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FUSION



ISSUE 51 £4.99

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ATARI: RECHARGED?

HANDS ON
WITH THE 2600+
AND EVERY
RECHARGED
ATARI CLASSIC
REVIEWED



SUPER POCKETS

ARE THE NEW
HANDHELDS
FROM BLAZE
WORTH PUTTING
ON YOUR
CHRISTMAS LIST?



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Retro-gaming
Publisher
since 2006



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FUSION Issue 51

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FUSION Magazine is published by
Fusion Retro Books, Dencer Drive, Kenilworth, CV8 2QR.

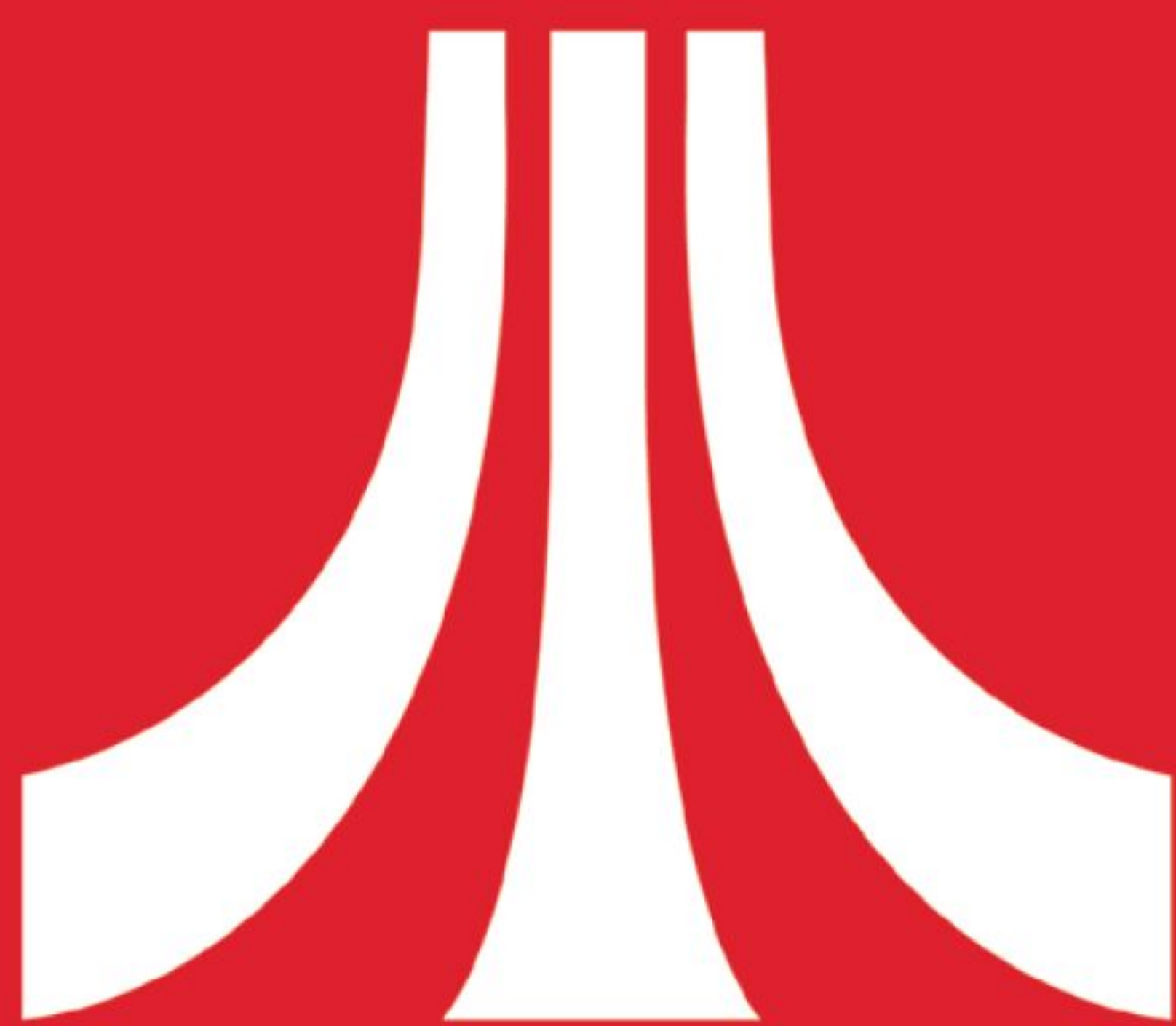
As I write this, it's been exactly a week since CRASH Live! took place, and I'm still smiling about it. You can find my diary of an excellent weekend in this issue, along with two other 'on location' articles. Faith Johnson reports from this year's Eurogamer Expo in London, and Ben Magnet has been to the real Mushroom Kingdom in Hollywood. So, from the Holiday Inn in Kenilworth to Hollywood, California, in one issue - not bad for a little crowd-funded games mag, eh? Ahem.

Moving on, it's that time of year again. The leaves are falling off the trees, and game publishers are falling over themselves, trying to tell you what gaming treats to buy this Christmas. Fortunately, this issue is stuffed with advice to help you decide. We take a deep dive into Atari's new console, and rate their Recharged classic games. Paul Twist finds out how wonderful Mario's new adventure really is, and Andrew Fisher and I test Blaze's new Super Pocket handhelds. We also get lost in the crowd with the latest *Assassin's Creed* game, and George Sturgeon takes on an Armoured Troll in *Hogwarts Legacy*. Of course, we have a selection of retro recommendations for you, too. Andrew Oyston tackles *Gungriffon Blaze* on the PS2, we revisit the Christmas parade in Gotham City on the SNES, find The Doctor on the BBC Micro, and make a case for the endangered species that is the CRT.

On behalf of the whole team – thank you for your continued support throughout 2023; it's been a blast! We'll see you next year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Editor
Ben Honebone



ATARI 2600+

BLASTING INTO THE FUTURE?

WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON



You may have seen our review of the Atari 2600+ over on the Fusion R Gamer website, and we concluded that it's a great device but not something that will appeal to everyone. It uses a hybrid system of real hardware and emulation that will satisfy those who enjoy modern tech and frustrate those who want their retro experiences pure in equal measure. Then there is the question of who this is aimed at, or more precisely, what type of gamer should buy this.

So, following our review, we decided to take a deeper dive into the nuances of the Atari 2600+, looking at its features, the included games, and the overall build of the machine and

its controllers. At first glance, it appears that Atari has released this to breathe new life into its brand. The recent wave of announcements about re-releasing 2600 games with contemporary art and features isn't coincidental. Atari seems serious about recreating a system with new games and catering to its old ones.

The technical specifications of the 2600+ are impressive. It boasts a clean 720p HDMI output that is lag-free and loads almost all 2600 and 7800 carts within seconds. There is no denying that this is a well-thought-out device with modern features that make it easy to set up and start playing. During our review, we were pleased to note that it worked with a variety of modern screens without any fuss and would fit seamlessly into any current household gaming setup.

It even has the ability (retro purists close your ears) to instantly set the output to widescreen



BERZERK ENHANCED EDITION

When *Berzerk* was ported to the 2600 for the first time, it lost the synthesised versions of the voices. Now Atari has made an 'Enhanced Edition' that adds the voices back in, patches some bugs, improves some sprites, and adds diagonal firing. This is the stand-out cart to be released alongside the new 2600+ due to its instant-arcade look, feel, and finesse. Anyone who has played the original will know just how much better this will be with all the upgrades.



MR. RUN AND JUMP

Atari promises that the first new 2600 game for over 30 years is the first in a line of brand-new titles that will work with the 2600+ and your original Atari consoles. *Mr. Run and Jump* is a tough game; fans of difficult platformers will appreciate the challenge. It's six levels long and has some excellent presentation with precise controls. It's a worthy purchase for those who plan to play the 2600+ in one-player mode and, hopefully, the start of many new games.

for those who want their 50-inch LED filled with Atari goodness. Anyone with an original Atari 2600, or even a 7800, will know that without modifying your system, these consoles only work with RF output. So, just having a modern way to play these old games without any extra steps is a blessing. It also uses a standard USB-C power cable. The whole kit feels robust and has a premium feel that, again, seems to state that Atari means business.

It wasn't just the modern features that impressed us either. The 2600+ also has all the original elements of the 'Woody' that those of a certain vintage will remember fondly. The ability to switch between 'A' and 'B' games to ramp up the difficulty is just a switch away, as is the 'mode' switch that gives a variety of different ways to play each game. The fact these need to be pressed on the actual console gives a

wonderfully tactile feel that will pump nostalgia into older minds and provide a history lesson to younger gamers.

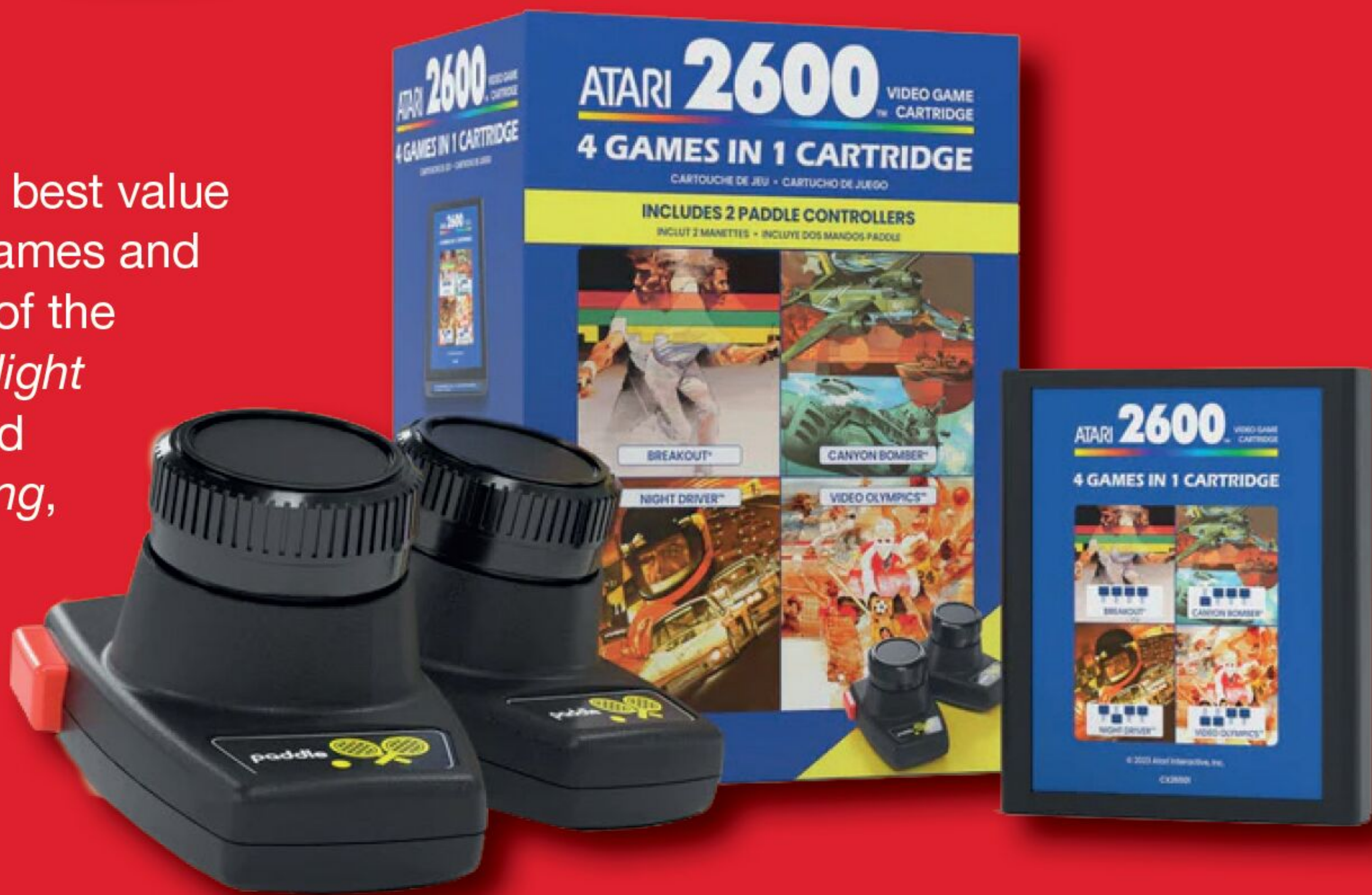
The joystick provided feels the same as the original; in our review, we commented that it was great to have a new one, and all your old ones will work due to the connectors being the same. It's a shame that Atari only provided one in the box, as having two from the start would have given some added value. However, an extra one is only £20, so this feels like a fair compromise for those who plan to play with friends and family. The joysticks are responsive and share the same premium feel as the console, although the cable length should've been longer.

The system comes with ten games on one cart that require the old-style dials to be set to select each title. In our review, we tried all the games, and it felt fair to say that four of the



4 GAMES IN 1

This compilation may seem like the best value for money, given that it has four games and comes with new 2600 paddles. Two of the games included, *Bomber Raid* and *Night Driver*, are middling, but *Breakout* and *Video Olympics*, better known as *Pong*, are both excellent. The paddles feel almost the same as the originals and work well. But overall, this pack is only for those who plan to play the 2600+ with a friend, as, to be honest, it's not much fun against the computer.



games, *Missile Command*, *Adventure*, *Combat* and *Yars' Revenge*, are excellent, although *Combat* is, unfortunately, still two-player only. Meanwhile, *Volleyball*, *Maze Craze*, and *Surround* have enough in them to be fun and great for multiplayer. The remaining three, *Video Pinball*, *Haunted House*, and *Dodge 'Em*, remind us that not all these old Atari games have stood the test of time. Then there are the new games, the first being the very playable *Mr. Run and Jump*, with Atari promising many more to come. The new 'Enhanced Edition' of *Berzerk* is the stand-out title, and it's recommended that if you're going for the 2600+, then this should also be budgeted for. It has added voice synthesisers from the arcade original and some extra features and graphics that make an already excellent 2600 title amazing to play today.

Overall, there will be early adopters of this system who hope Atari will keep the new software coming. It feels like the Evercade

ecosystem, where those buying into it intend to keep purchasing the carts. The 2600+ isn't like a mini with preloaded games or wireless features; it's a reimagining of an actual console that requires some trust from those who dive into it. If you want a clean setup or don't fancy buying new carts every other month, you probably won't see the value here. But those who already have a stack of carts will benefit from the modern connection and a chance to buy new software for their collections.

The final word on the Atari 2600+ is that Atari wants to reignite that early 80s home console vibe and seems focused on providing new experiences with modern touches that appeal to older and younger gamers alike. The £100 price point does mean it's an investment, but if it goes on sale soon, it will be hard not to recommend. It all just boils down to how much nostalgia you have for these games and where you stand on buying the carts to use with it. ■



EVENT DIARY

Words by Ben Honebone

Just under a year after the first CRASH Live! Event was held in Bescot Stadium last November, and hot on the heels of this past August's ZZAP! Live, the CRASH party arrived at its new location in the Holiday Inn in Kenilworth on Saturday, the 18th of November. This year's event was stacked with familiar and famous faces from the world of the Speccy and featured the most mind-boggling array of hardware yet. Everything from the ZX80 to the PS5 was available to sample by the hungry hordes of attendees, with the computers, consoles, and visitors themselves all spanning four or five generations.

Friday 17th November

The CRASH Live! journey begins, as many tend to, with a long drive. My wife, Melanie, and I set off from Swansea at around 9:30 AM and reached the Holiday Inn in Kenilworth by 12:30 PM, in good time. After checking in and meeting up with everyone, it was time to get to work setting up the event. A conference was taking place in the main hall until late afternoon, so we focused on getting the Talks room kitted out with a stage, chairs, PA, and projector, while the Retro



Above: Sir Clive watching over preparations for CRASH Live!

Collective team assembled their Arcade Archive in the room opposite.

After some food and a quick recharge, the conference in the main hall had concluded, and the space was finally ours to fill with Sinclair magic. At this point, the main hall becomes a chaotic hive of activity with tables being loaded in, monitors and Sinclair computers of all shapes and sizes being assembled and tested, and traders setting up their shops for the big day. It



Above: A completely unnecessary shot of "modern" consoles.



Below: This is what it's all about.



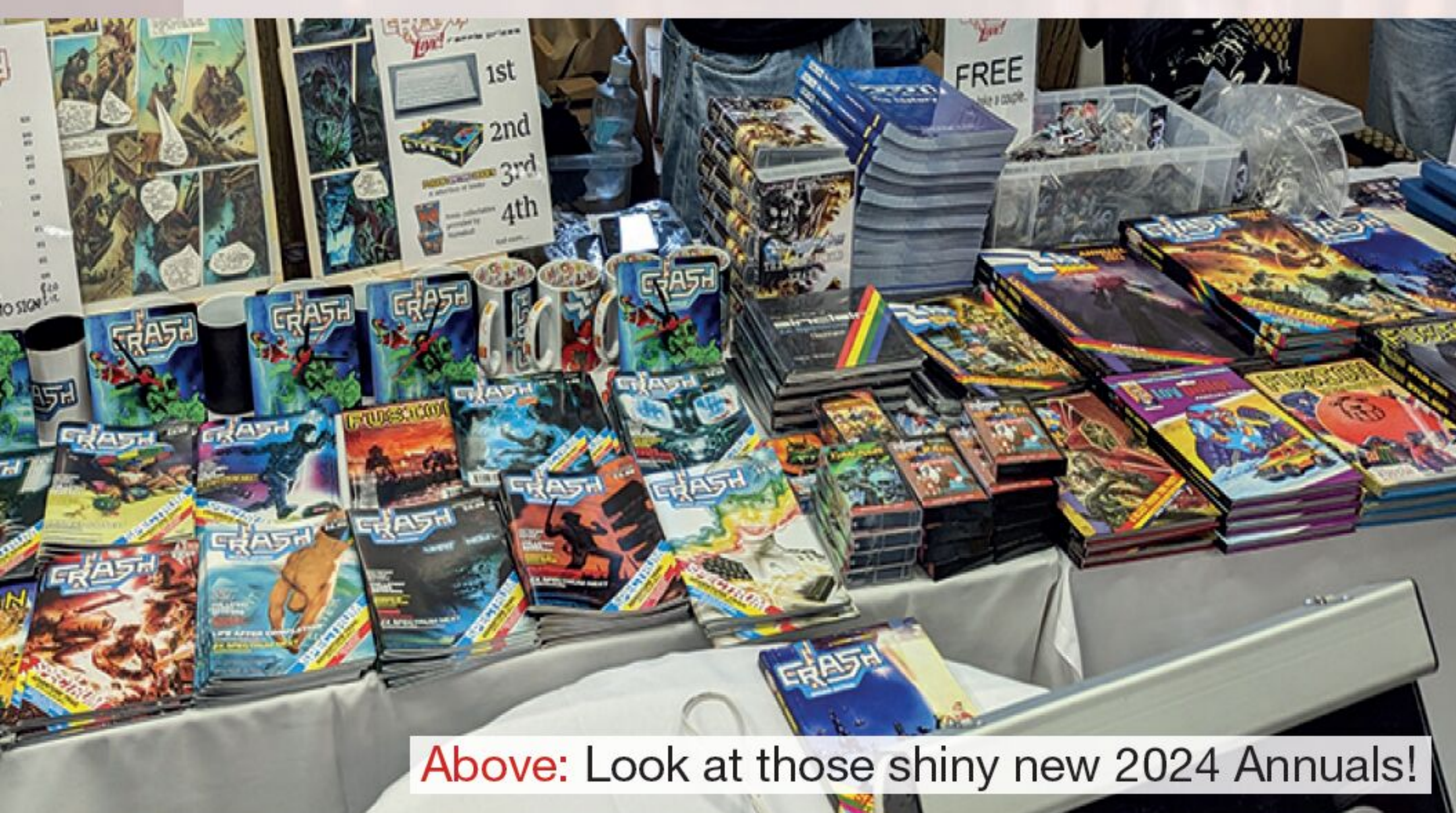
Above: The Psytronik Software stall.



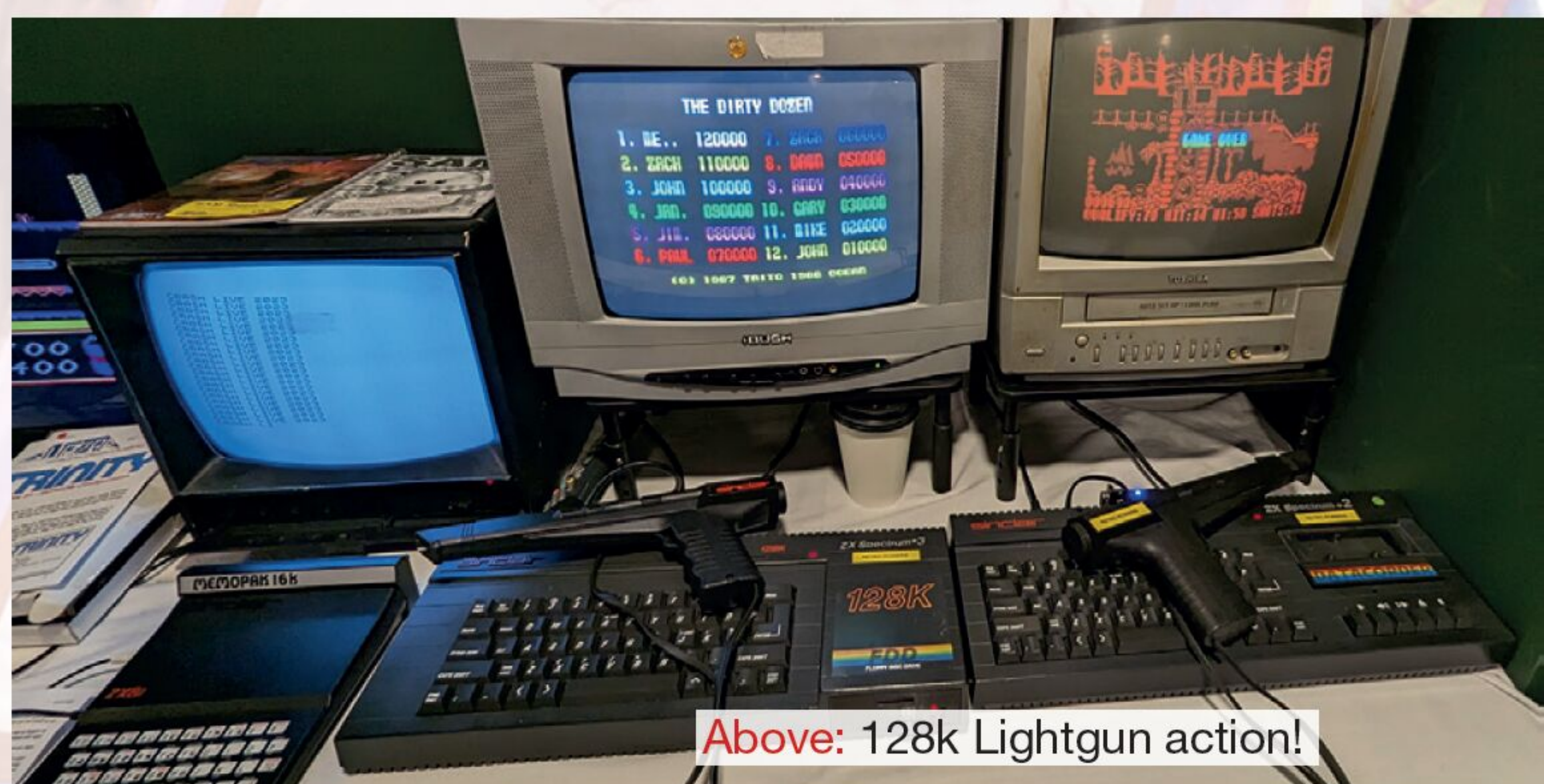
Above: The Spectrum Next team giving the first of two Talks.



Above: The Arcade hosted by Retro Collective & Arcade Archive.



Above: Look at those shiny new 2024 Annuals!



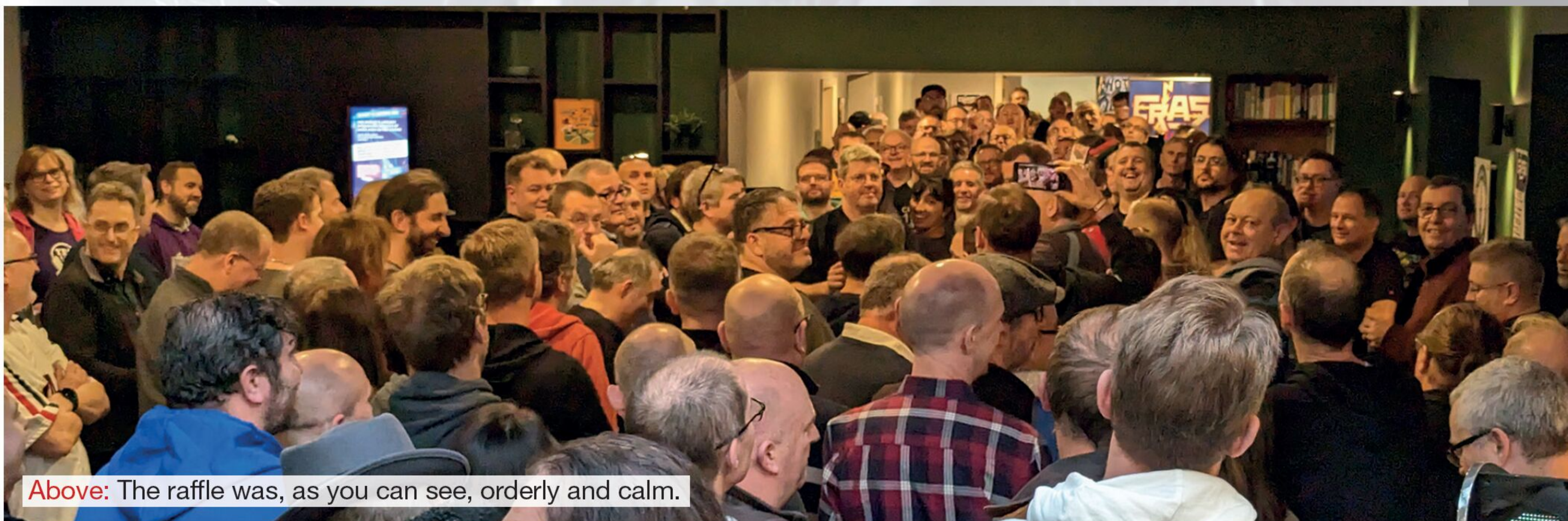
Above: 128k Lightgun action!

sounds like a lot of hard work, and it is, but it's also a chance for everyone to chat, exchange ideas, and have a good laugh. While all that is going in the main hall, the "corridor of consoles and computers" is also being constructed, stretching from the main hall entrance to the hotel reception desk and featuring a rogues' gallery of gaming treats from the 70s, 80s, 90s, and beyond.

At around 11 PM, the majority of the event was assembled and ready, with just a few more arcade cabinets, computers, and stalls left to be added. One advantage of attending CRASH Live this year was seeing the new 2024 Annuals that Chris had taken delivery of shortly before the event. Seeing everyone's hard work on the four books in print form for the first time is always a thrill, and I'm pleased to report that they all look fabulous. With that, it was time to get some sleep before the real action began.

Saturday 18th November

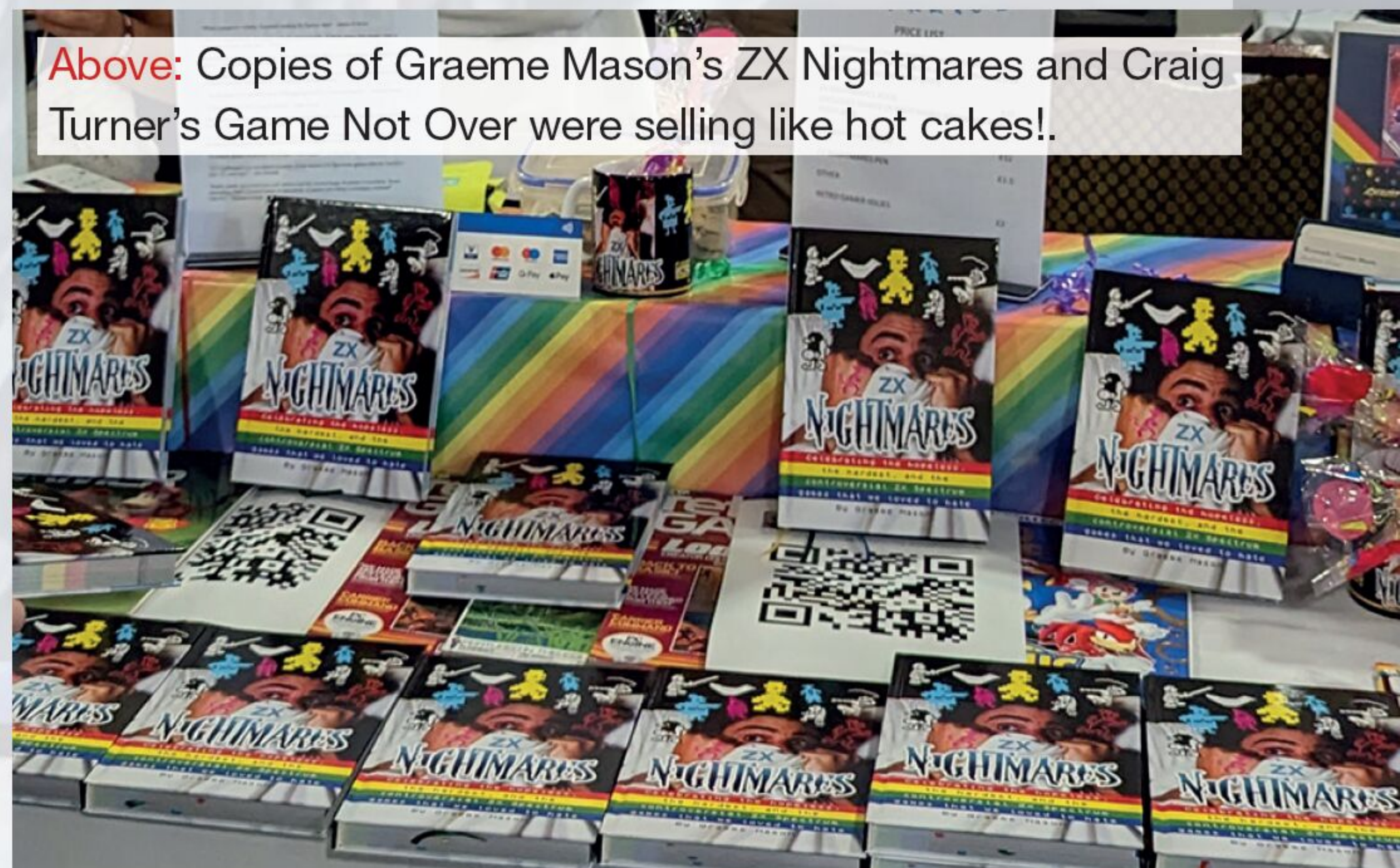
When we took the lift downstairs for breakfast at 8:30 AM, the hotel was already a hive of CRASH-related activity. By 9:30, a queue had formed at the main entrance, so Nomita and Melanie opened the floodgates and started handing out wristbands. I hung around at the front desk to swap out a faulty monitor, and by the time I looked up again – the event was in full swing. Andrew Braybrook and Steve Turner were preparing to give the first Talk of the day, and grinning attendees were discovering the new Arcade room. Vintage Space Invaders, Millipede, and Robotron cabs were among the retro delights on offer, along with a range of Arcade 1UP and Legends Ultimate machines of all shapes and sizes.



Above: The raffle was, as you can see, orderly and calm.



Above: After appearing in last month's issue of FUSION, Iain Lee popped up at CRASH Live! and met Chris.



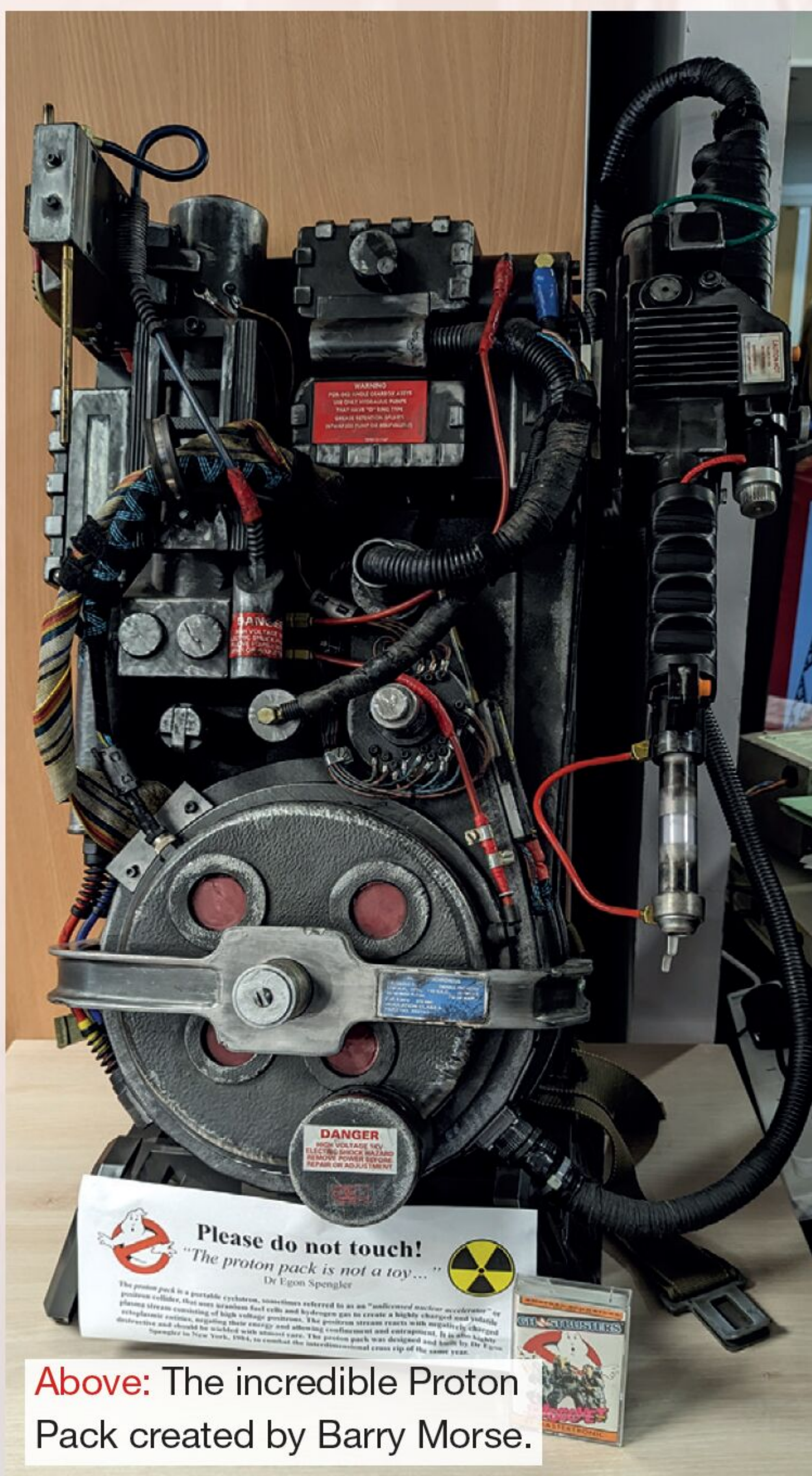
Above: Copies of Graeme Mason's ZX Nightmares and Craig Turner's Game Not Over were selling like hot cakes!.

Heading through the lobby towards the main hall, I greeted the Antstream Arcade team and their couch gaming setup, which included an impressive Samsung Gaming Hub cabinet running Antstream games and challenges. Moving on, a sea of gamers of all ages lined both sides of the corridor, enjoying the host of setups available that included Commodore PET, N64, Amiga, Saturn, C64, Xbox, BBC Micro, Dreamcast, and Evercade, to name just a few. At the end of the corridor, I stopped to chat with Marc Jowett and admire his N64 Magazine collection when, as if by magic, Wil Overton appeared next to us, and we enjoyed an enlightening chat about his time at the magazine and his move to Rare to work on *Perfect Dark Zero*.

The main hall was buzzing with 8-bit activity, and the first trader was Alan, selling some very nice items from his collection, including a Sinclair PC200 that was snapped up quickly. Next door was the Fusion Retro Books stall, followed by YAM YAM Retro Gaming, with Craig Turner signing copies of his new book, *Game Not Over*. On the left side of the hall, 'The Early Years' of Sinclair offered numerous ZX80, ZX81, and 16k and 48k Spectrum setups to enjoy, along with some versions of the Spectrum you may not be



Above: The Antstream Arcade cabinet was very popular.



Above: The incredible Proton Pack created by Barry Morse.



Above: You can watch all the Talks here - <https://bit.ly/49QUcBa>.



Above: (from left to right) Chris, Wayne, Ben, Melanie, and Alan, shortly after packing up at around 11PM on Saturday night. Phew!

familiar with. On the right side, 'The Classic Years' offered Machines like the Spectrum+, Spectrum 128, +2, and +3, followed by the Spectrum Next Team's table at the top. The Next team were as popular as ever, with this year's raffle offering a white Spectrum Next as the first prize. The raffle was a slightly chaotic highlight of the day, especially for the winners!

Graeme Mason was on hand to sign copies of his new book, ZX Nightmares, and talk about the upcoming companion book, ZX Dreams. Alongside him, the Sintech, Psytronik, and You Make Robots teams had stalls and chatted with attendees. As I completed my lap of the hall, I arrived at the Retro Gear stall where Barry Morse introduced me to his, frankly incredible, Proton Pack – a handmade recreation of the Ghostbusters movie prop with astonishing detail and authentic lights and sounds. It might not be a Spectrum, but it made my jaw drop. Throughout the day, retro gaming celebrities like Ian Oliver, Clive Townsend, Simon Butler, and Iain Lee could be found chatting with attendees or giving Talks. The relaxed atmosphere of CRASH Live! and the approachability of our gaming heroes are part of what makes events like this so unique and special.

As the sun went down and the final Talk from

The Art of Loading concluded, everyone took a break to get some food and prepare for the evening screening of Gracious Films' The Rubber Keyed Wonder. Unfortunately, duty calls, and while attendees watched the movie, the rest of us began the task of packing everything up. Far from a solemn affair, however, everyone was in high spirits after a successful day, and teamwork was in full effect to get the job done. After leaving a few arcade cabinets available to play after the film, we took a quick photo with everyone on hand and signed off for the day feeling tired but happy.

Sunday 19th November

leary-eyed and slightly confused, Melanie and I hit breakfast at 9 AM before returning to the main hall to spend some time packing the van with Chris, Alan, and the "Pack Master", Wayne Robbins. It was good to grab a slice of extra time with the team before setting off home – a fitting end to a fantastic celebration of Sir Clive's legacy and everything retro besides. Same time next year, yeah? ■



SUPER MARIO BROS. WONDER



PAUL TWIST JOINS MARIO AND PALS FOR THEIR FIRST FORAY INTO THE FLOWER KINGDOM.



After lying dormant for a few years, the 2D *Super Mario Bros.* games made a welcome return, with the *New Super Mario Bros.* series in 2006. While fans were divided on its merits, the games did recapture the look and feel of the 2D *Super Mario* 8 and 16-bit classics, scratching a longstanding itch for fans. However, as good as the *New Super Mario Bros.* games might have been, we couldn't help but feel something was lacking compared to the original *Super Mario World*. They were solid *Mario* platformers but not especially innovative or creative, and they lacked a certain sense of, well, wonder, which brings us right up to date with the appropriately titled *Super Mario Bros. Wonder*.



At its core, *SMBW* may stick to the classic formula of running, jumping, stomping, and block smashing, but it also has some new tricks of its own. If you know your *SMB* power-up hierarchy, you'll know that the flower is a step up from the mushroom, so it's appropriate that visiting the Flower Kingdom instead of the Mushroom Kingdom steps things up a little. Among the new additions are platforms formed by flying birds, some light puzzle solving, 'battle levels', and plenty more. I won't go into too much detail here because I don't want to spoil the fun of you potentially discovering *SMBW*'s many splendours for yourself. I will say that the

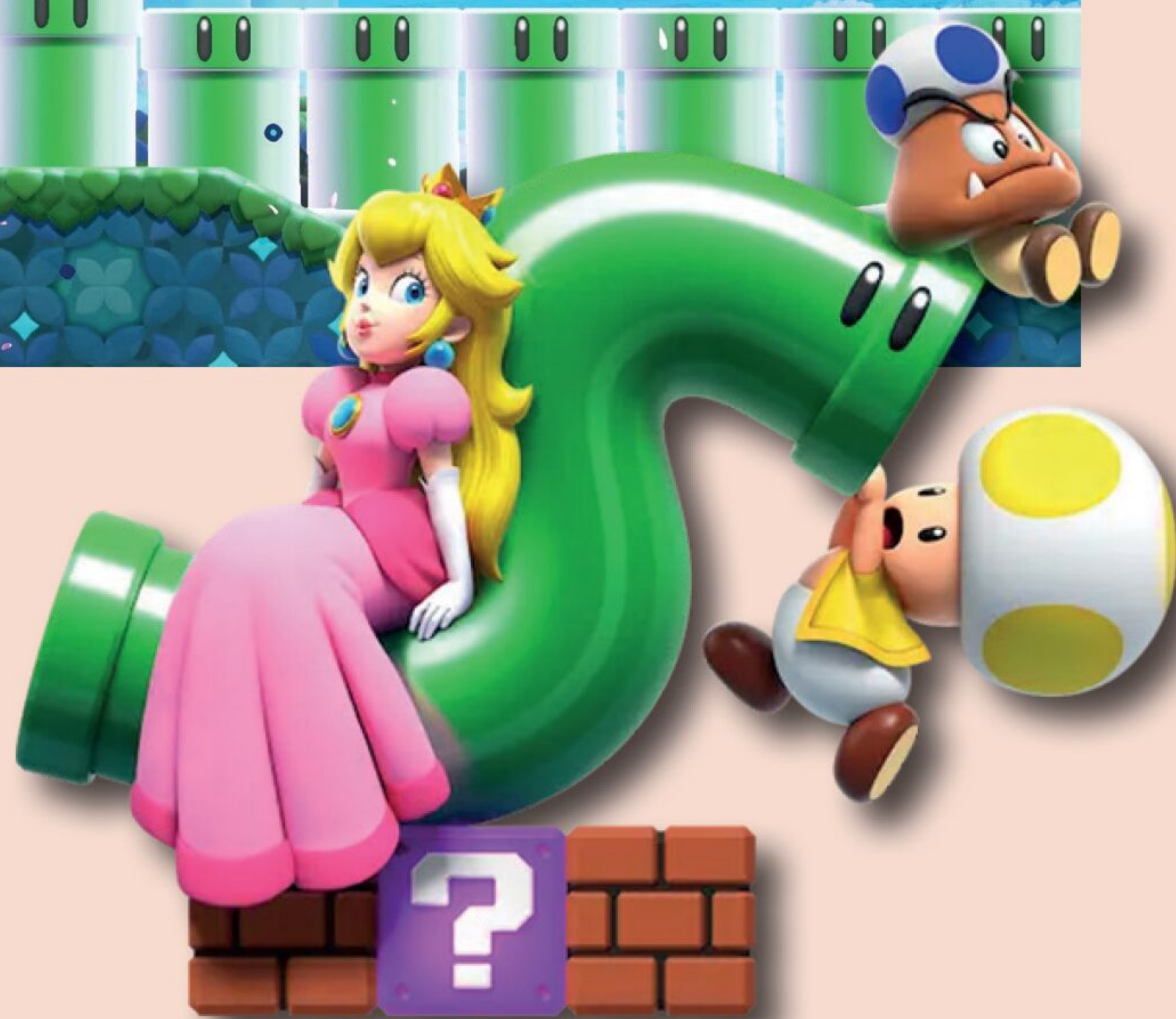




much-trumpeted “Elephant Mario” is as much fun to play as he looks, wielding his trunk as a whip-like weapon. Also welcome is the ability to push certain pipes to uncover hidden objects and pipes that transport you to previously inaccessible areas in the level’s background.

Mario’s not alone this time, with the option to play the game as Luigi, Princesses Peach and Daisy, Toad, Toadette, Yoshi (in multiple colours), and Nabbit. Each character has slightly different abilities, making some characters better suited to certain levels than others. Having multiple playable characters is perhaps an inessential addition to the tried and trusted *Super Mario* formula, but it does add a bit of variety to the game, increasing its longevity. Being able to choose from a roster of characters also brings to mind the Western version of *SMBII*, though that’s not exactly the best-loved entry in the series, so we shouldn’t dwell on that.

SMBW certainly looks gorgeous; it is arguably the best-looking 2D *Mario* game ever. But static images only tell half of the story. Thankfully, it’s beautifully animated and has real character, helping to ensure that despite its classic run ‘n’ jump gameplay, it looks and feels every bit a 21st-century game. The classic *Super Mario Bros.* typeface used throughout the game adds to the sense of nostalgia, while the charming voice acting just about avoids crossing the line and becoming irritating. Speaking of



voice acting, I suspect nobody but the most eagle-eared would notice Charles Martinet no longer voicing Mario. The gameplay and stunning presentation are delightfully embellished with that uniquely Nintendo style of creativity and combined to make a genuine wonder of a game.

So, if you were wondering whether Nintendo has once again struck gold (coins) with *SMBW*, then wonder no more; the answer is a resounding “Yes!”. While it’s not the genre-redefining reinvention of the 2D platforming game we might have hoped for, it is undoubtedly one of the best 2D platform games of this generation, and in my opinion, it’s the best 2D *Mario* platformer since 1990’s *Super Mario World*. *SMBW* is a triumph of finely honed platform game mechanics. 🍄





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TEST TUBE 3

BATMAN 3



FUSION

Game : **Batman Returns**
Year : **1992**
System : **SNES**
Words : **Ben Honebone**



■ It's Christmas in Gotham, and the citizens of the metropolis have gathered for the annual festive parade. The celebrations are abruptly halted by the Red Triangle Circus Gang, who descend upon the scene astride their motorbikes, breathing fire and trashing everything. So goes the opening of the 1992 film *Batman Returns*, and fittingly, the opening of the SNES 'game of the film' released in the same year does the same thing, with style.

Leveraging their experience adapting popular franchises to the beat 'em-up formula, Konami brings a slice of arcade magic to the SNES with *Batman Returns*. The presentation and faithfulness to the source material are stunning, with text and digitised stills from the film conveying the story, while beautifully drawn and recognisable locations are the backdrop to all the scrapping. The combat is where *Batman Returns* shines, boasting a pleasing array of ways to pummel your opponents, and if you can grab two henchmen simultaneously, you can smash their heads together! You also have access to Batman's gadgets, with a handy Batarang projectile that can stun opponents, the Batrope (is that what it's called?) for tool-assisted flying kicks, and a handy smart bomb for clearing the screen.

The gameplay itself has more in common with Capcom's *Final Fight* than any of Konami's previous titles. The snappy combat feel and the ability to auto-grab enemies when you're close to them and choose from several follow-up attacks are reminiscent of Haggar and Company's style. But, with the addition of some abilities unique to Batman, you can mix up the action in Gotham with more strategic options than can be found in Capcom's coin-swallowing stroll through Metro City.

Everything Konami does in its faithful adaptation of Michael Keaton's second outing as the Dark Knight is pitch-perfect, from the digitised stills and fantastic renditions of Danny Elfman's score to the responsive controls, satisfying combat, and inventive level design. *Batman Returns* is as good as, if not better, than either of Konami's *TMNT* arcade classics. Yup, I said it. Fight me! ■

WE'RE BIG FANS OF EVERCADE, SO WHEN BLAZE ANNOUNCED THE SUPER POCKET, ANDREW FISHER AND BEN HONEBONE PUT IN THEIR PRE-ORDERS!

Blaze Entertainment has built a solid brand with Evercade, getting collectors interested in the hardware and keeping the fans happy with regular releases of new cartridges. But there was scepticism on the announcement of "Hyper Mega-Tech". Why a new brand, and how would it affect future Evercade releases? That all became clear with the Super Pocket.

The two initial releases are dedicated to Taito and Capcom, respectively. The Capcom games had previously been available built-in to the Evercade EXP console, which had left some fans unhappy that it was not a stand-alone Evercade cartridge. However, the licensing deals with these two companies allowed the creation of these new products, each featuring games built into the hardware. For the collectors, Funstock released a limited edition double-pack with unique transparent shells rather than the solid colours of the separate handhelds.

One key feature added to these two initial handhelds is an Evercade cartridge slot compatible with over 400 games released in that format. Any future cartridges requiring a firmware update

REVIEW BY ANDREW FISHER

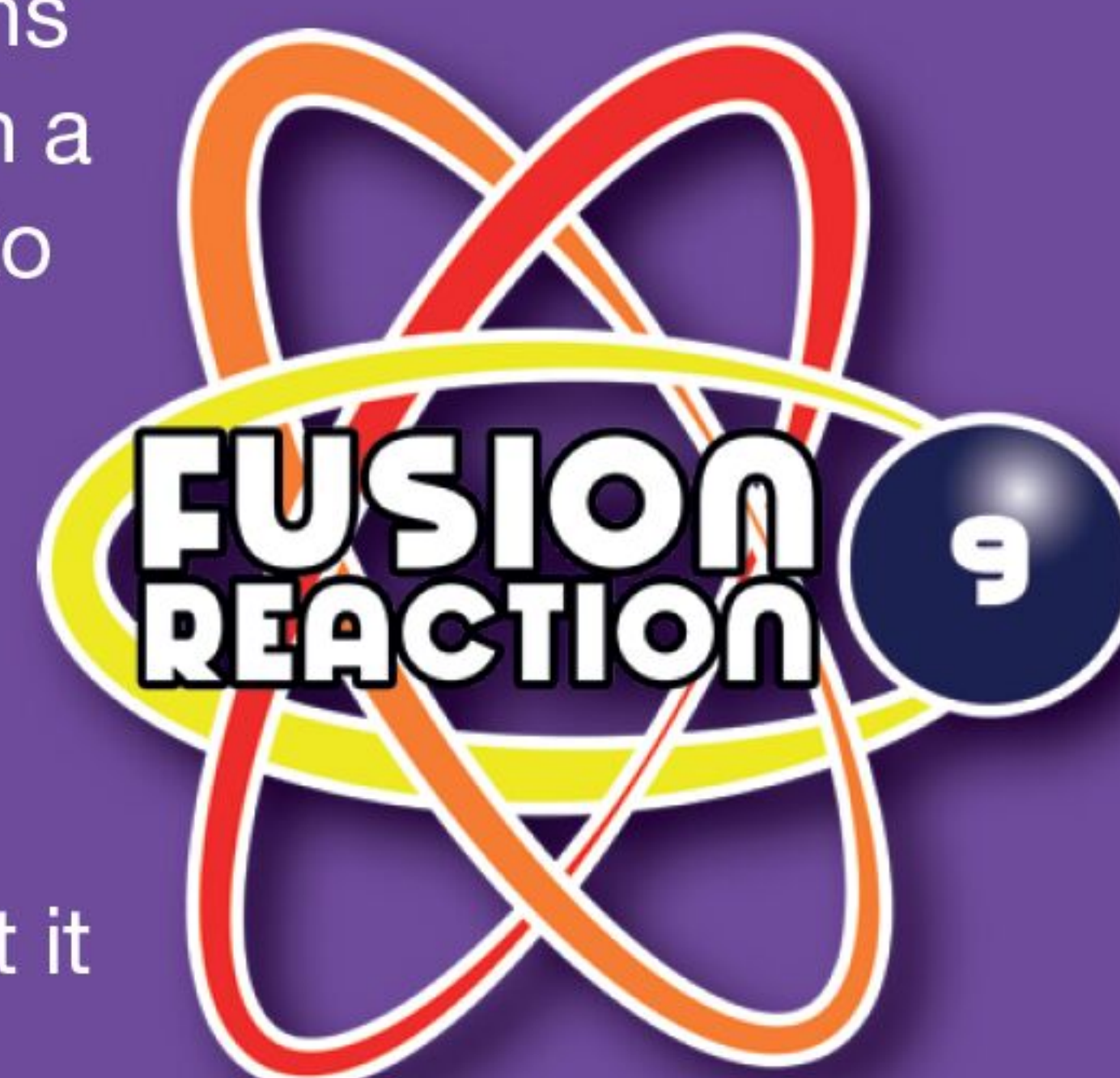
TAITO[®] EDITION SUPER POCKET

**HYPER
MEGA
TECH.**



The Taito Super Pocket is filled with bright, colourful games and comes in a vivid green shell. The quality matches the previous Evercade products. The buttons all feel responsive, and the D-pad is pleasant to use. Ironically, none of the games in this selection use the rear buttons – but they are there for compatibility with the Evercade cartridges. Speaking of which, the issue of "tight" cartridges does appear again here with some early titles. But in general, it is a superb addition to the console to have that compatibility built-in (although early adopters have reported some issues with individual cartridges). The screen is excellent and shines clearly. Most of the games look fine, with only the zoomed-in (vertical) action of *Kiki Kaikai* having some visibility issues on this device. The menu system is straightforward to use, and it's a nice touch to have the in-game Controls reference if you need it.

Standout titles for me were *Don Doko Don* and *The Fairyland Story*, which are difficult to get hold of in Europe and are fun single-screen platformers. *Bubble Bobble* remains one of the greatest games ever, no dispute, and is so much fun to play on a handheld. *Liquid Kids* never got an official conversion (aside from the Taito Legends compilations) and is a welcome addition. *Football Champ* and *Legend of Kage* were not much fun, however, and appear dated, but I love how *Space Invaders* simulates the coloured plastic bands added to the original monochrome machine. *Operation Wolf* seems like an odd choice for D-pad controls controlling an on-screen cursor; it works but never feels completely fluid. Platform fanatics will enjoy this selection, but it feels like certain games have been left out for use in the future.



on the Evercade may be incompatible with Super Pocket. This is due to there currently being no way to update the Super Pocket firmware. Certain legacy titles (no longer sold by Evercade due to the license expiring) may not play at all.

Both devices have a standard handheld layout in a vertical position. The 2.8" IPS screen is at the top, with the Home button, which is just below in the centre, used for accessing the settings on the main menu, and during a game giving access to display and sound options and letting you save and load your game. The D-pad is on the left, with four face buttons and traditional Select and Start (with Select used to insert a coin in arcade games). On the back are four shoulder buttons arranged in pairs. The

headphone jack, power switch, and USB-C charging port are at the device's base. The device comes with a charging cable, and battery life is reported as being four hours minimum.

The menu system resembles the Evercade layout, allowing you to choose between the built-in game library, the Evercade slot, and the overall Settings menu (with display options and sound settings that affect the menus and the games). Selecting a game from the carousel starts the game itself. The Home button in-game has a summary of the Controls, which is helpful. There are six save slots per game, loaded and saved from the Menu. Quitting takes you back to the main menu without resetting the game or cartridge.

REVIEW BY BEN HONEBONE



CAPCOM® EDITION

SUPER POCKET

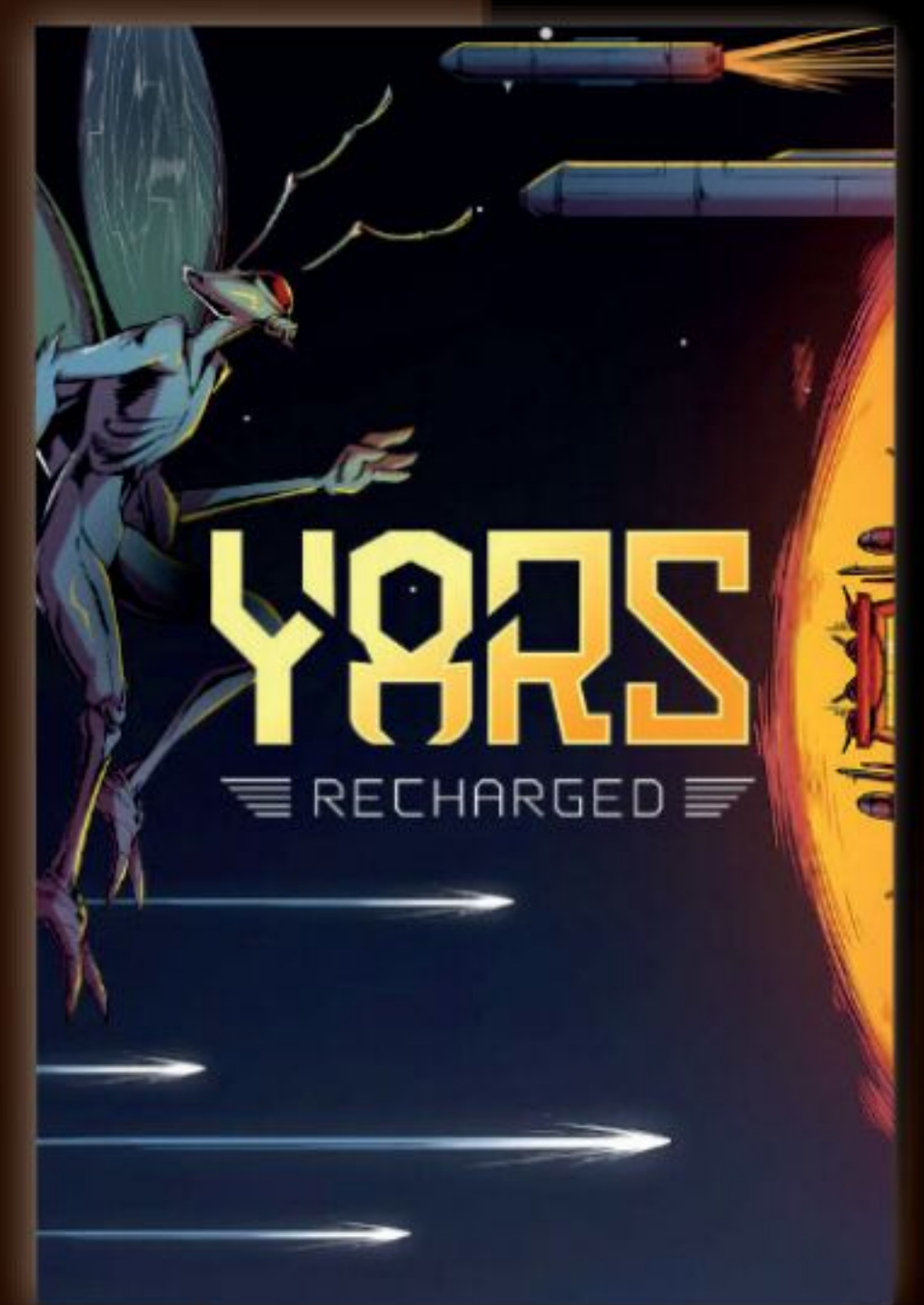
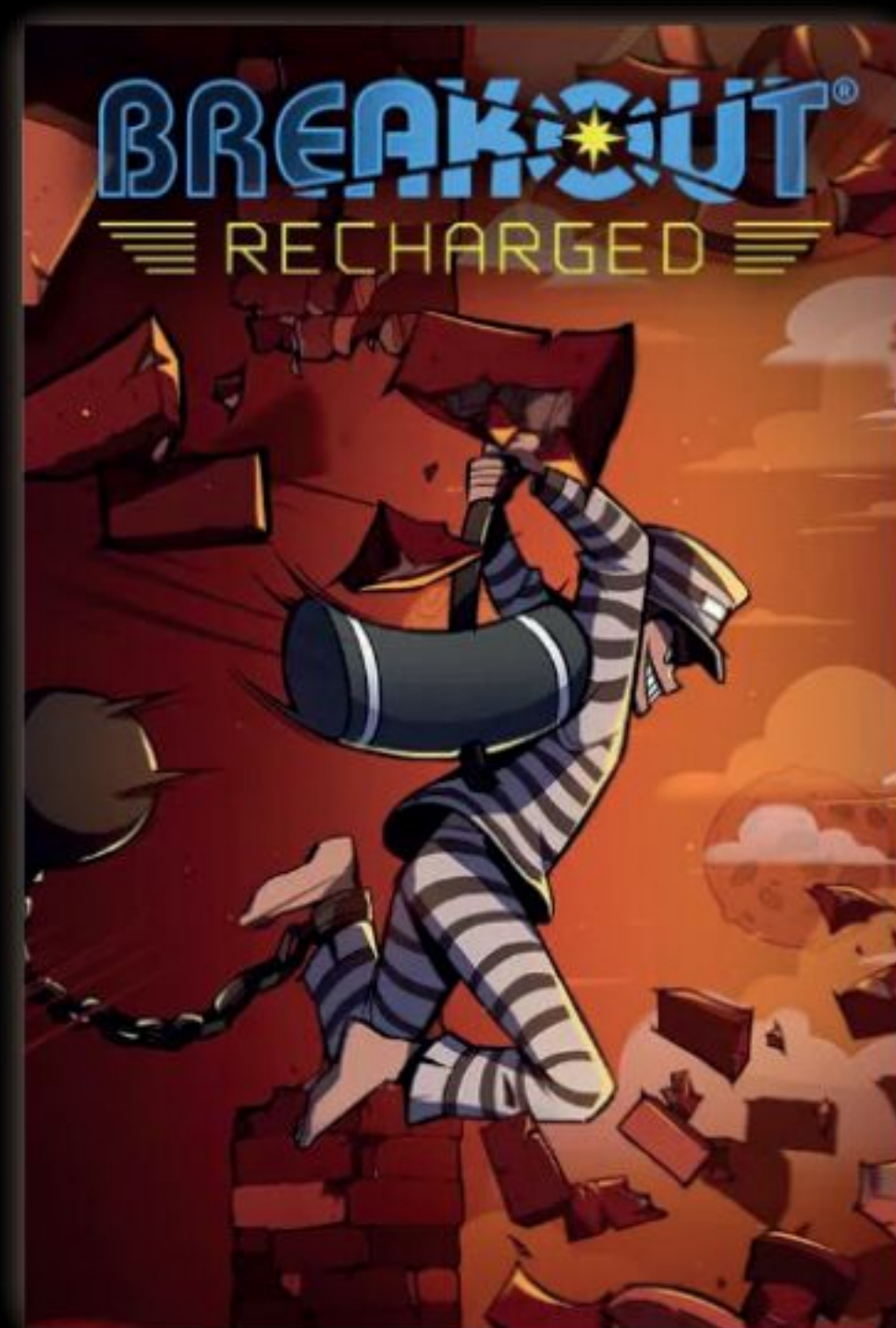
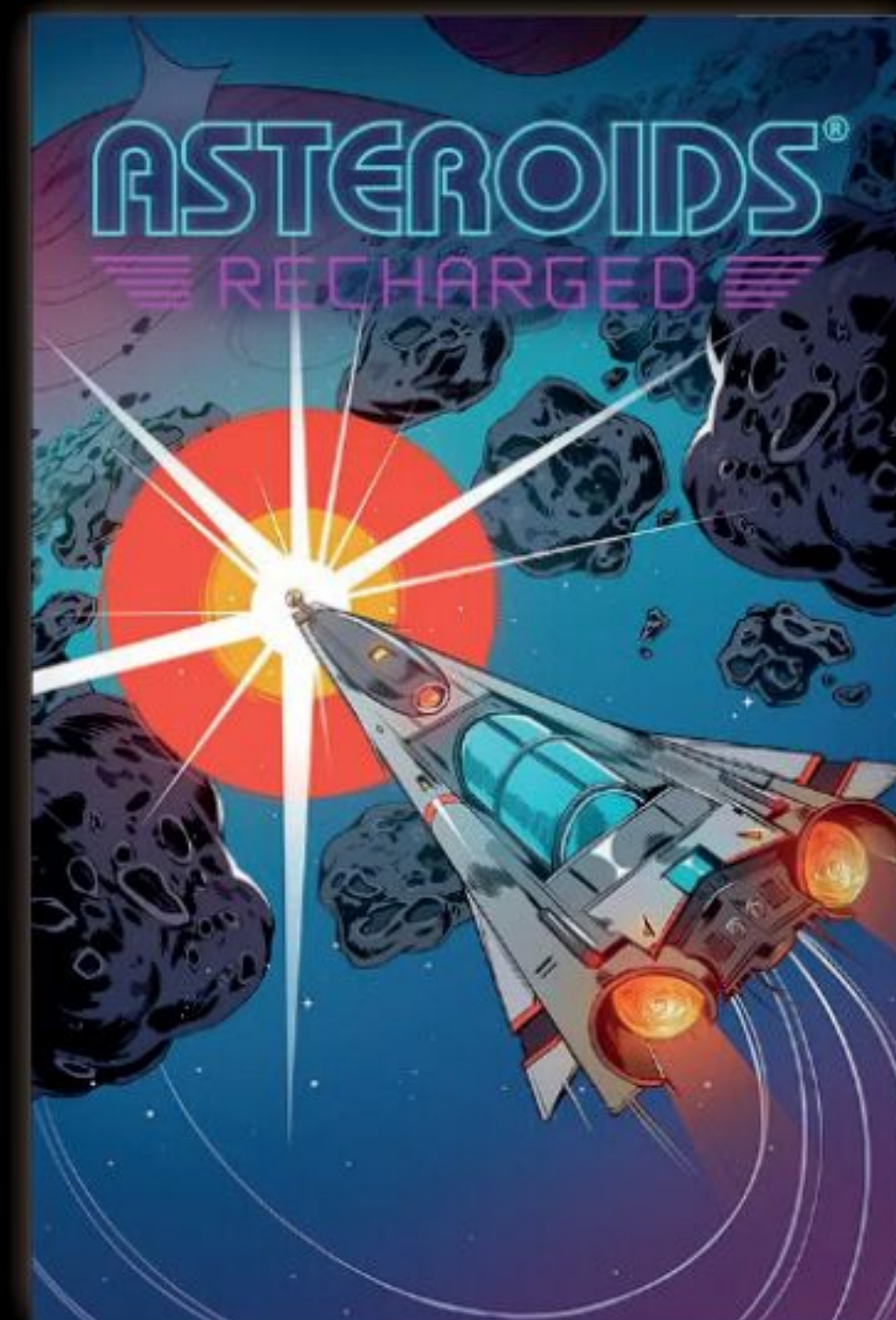
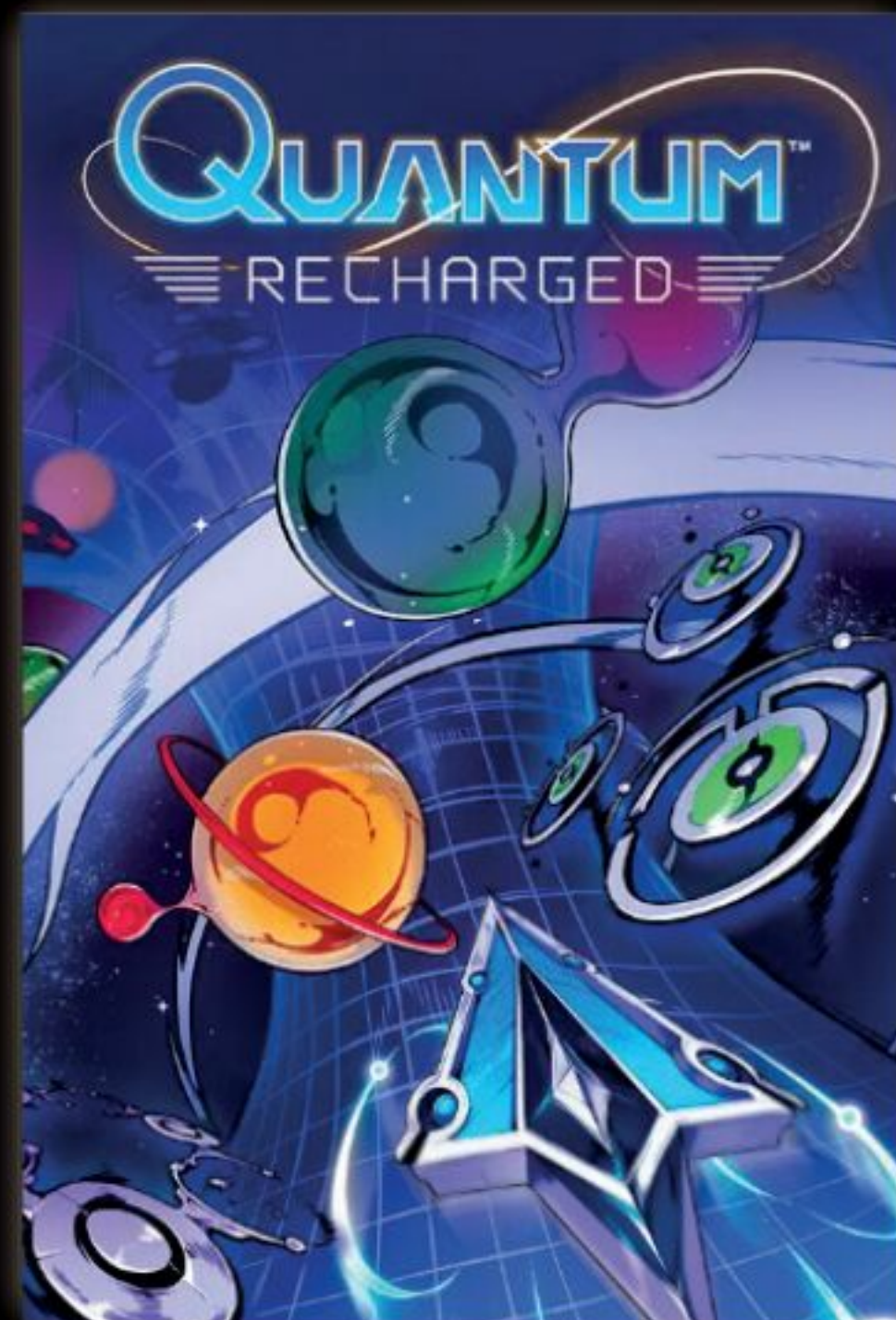
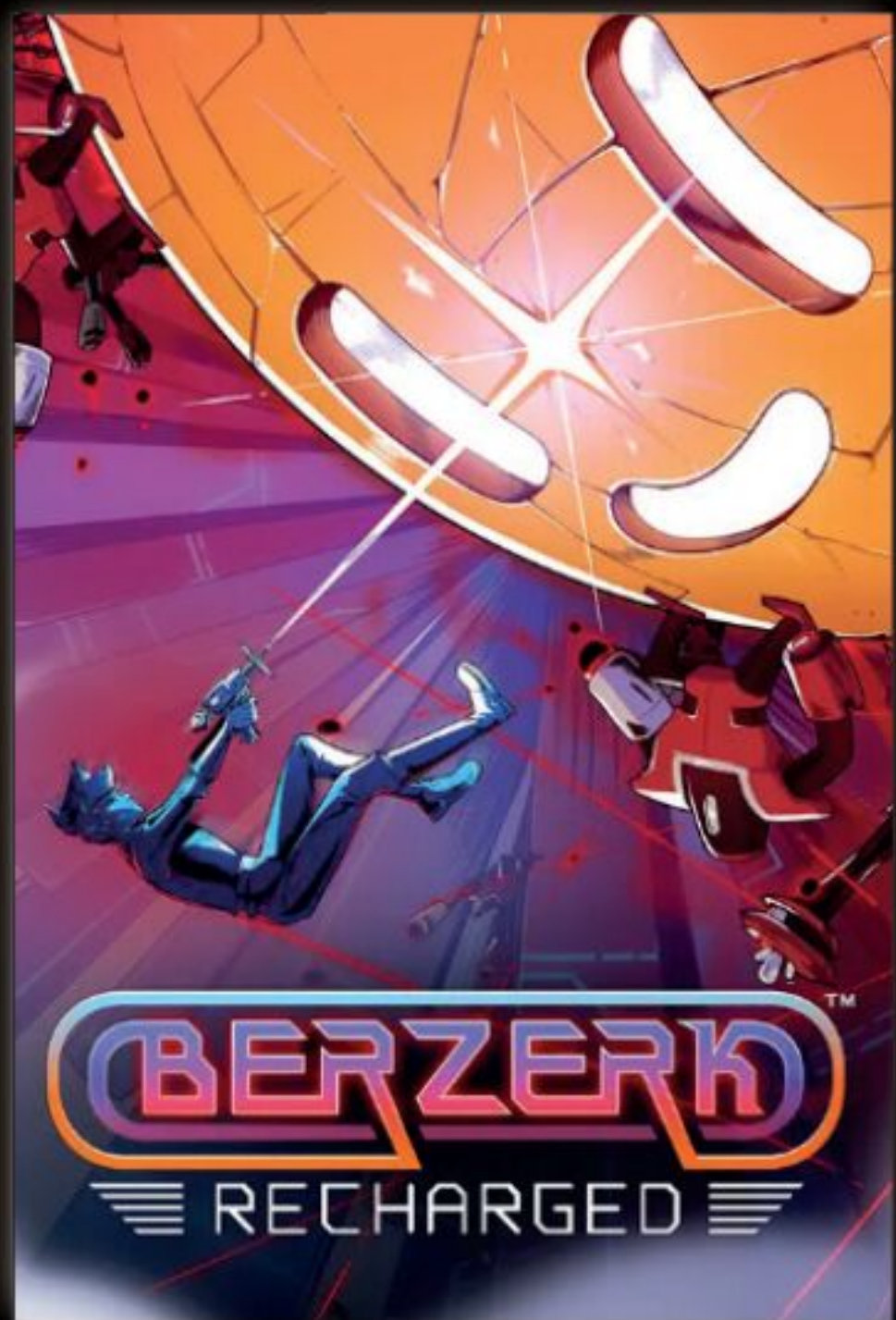
The Super Pocket is an attractive prospect: a pocket-sized Evercade console at less than half the price of the Evercade EXP. It seems like a “no-brainer”, and including a licensed Capcom version with arcade classics like *Street Fighter II*, *Final Fight*, and *Forgotten Worlds* meant that, for me, it was. The good news is that Blaze has succeeded in creating a cheaper alternative to the Evercade with the same build quality we’ve come to expect from them. The screen is excellent from any angle, the D-Pad and four face buttons feel robust and responsive, and the sound is adequate. So, happy days then? Not quite.

The Capcom Edition’s drawbacks lie with the rear buttons and the choice of games for the smaller system. Nine of the twelve games included look and play fantastically on the small screen, but the vertical orientation of *1942*, *1943*, and *Mercs* means that the action is further reduced in size, making these titles more of a challenge to enjoy. The display options allow you to stretch the graphics to fullscreen, but the result is ugly and undesirable. *SFII Hyper Fighting* is also a challenge to play, but for the wrong reason. The positioning of the rear buttons on the Super Pocket isn’t ideal, and trying to play a six-button fighting game correctly is much harder than it should be. The control configuration cannot be changed, so you’re stuck with the fierce attacks tied to the two outer back buttons. I am slowly getting used to it, but it’s a shame that the flagship title for the system suffers due to the button layout. Conversely, *Forgotten Worlds* is a joy to play on the Super Pocket, and benefits from the rear buttons being used to rotate your character.

This Capcom Edition of the Super Pocket is a solid, quality product that I recommend. It’s not perfect, and I can’t ignore the fact that *SFII* is difficult to control on this device. However, the price point and library of games available via Evercade cartridges mean it offers good value. It’s an excellent retro stocking filler with some of the best arcade classics in the business. ■



ATARI: RECHARGED?



WORDS BY PAUL MORRISON

Despite being one of the founding fathers of video games, Atari has something of a chequered relationship with the gaming community. Although they were revered until the early 90s, a sequence of disastrous events have seen them not merely shoot themselves in the foot, but practically blow both feet off, such has been their incompetence. Recently, however, leading up to this, the year of their 50th anniversary, they seem to have taken stock and gone back to basics, while bringing their classic names into the present. Is this pillaging of their past setting them on the road to redemption, or is it yet another reason for gamers to get out the pitchforks?

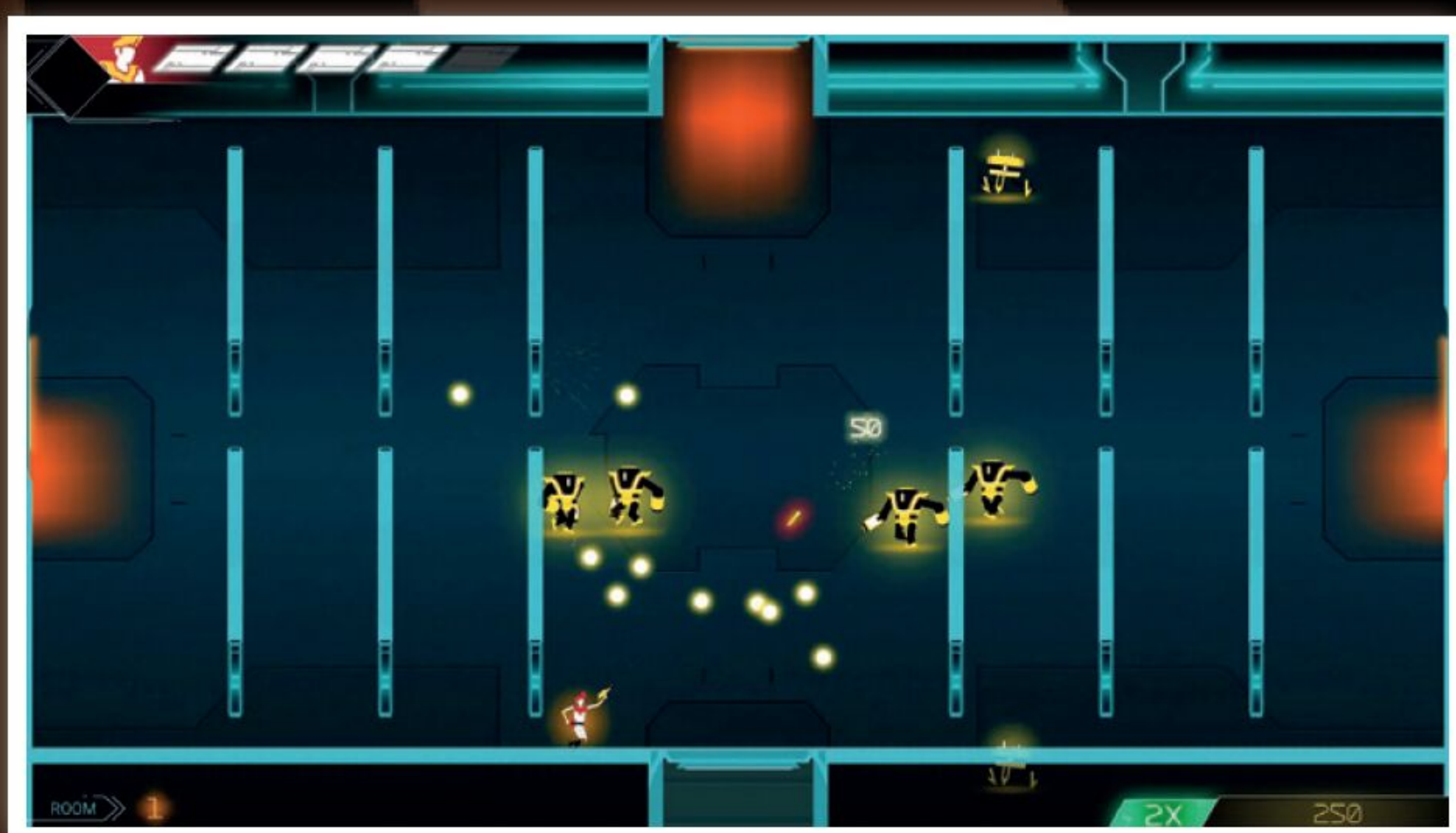
In what you'd have to say is a bold move, Atari have updated the graphics and sound in their *Recharged* games, without any option to play in the original styles. That might seem a bit pointless, but the recharging comes courtesy of missions that have been added to each game to give you something to do beyond merely getting high scores. The success of these remakes mostly lives or dies on the quality of these challenges, and it's fair to say that some are more successful than others. The challenges are, in most games, short and sweet, and with each having their own online leaderboards, there's a fair chance you'll become semi-famous if you're any good (although seeing myself at number 3 in the world on some challenges after only one try made me question the number of global players). The essence of the original games is there, but they've all been given modern twists.

ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED



Games don't come much more iconic than *Asteroids*, so it's a relief to find that the core game hasn't been messed with too much, although the asteroids now look like hunks of cheese from Tom and Jerry. There are three standard game modes, although don't get too excited by "Classic" mode as it's not the original game, but it is very challenging. Classic Recharged is the most fun, giving the standard three lives but a steady stream of fun weapons power-ups with which to annihilate the asteroids. The challenges are plentiful, entertaining and never outstay their welcome. This is a worthwhile update. **8/10**

BERZERK: RECHARGED



The most recent *Recharged* game is this maze shooter classic, and the most obvious update is that it's been modified into a twin-stick shooter – kind of. For some reason, you have to point in the direction you want to shoot and hit a trigger button to actually fire. There are other missteps here, too. For one, the walls are not electrified. That was such a big part of the original game that I can't for the life of me imagine why they'd take it out. For two, you can actually outrun the new Evil Otto. He's this huge bouncy ball, but you can just run around the maze with him following you, and if he gets close, use your dash to get away again. It's a shame – the original is

so brilliantly tense, but the feelings of dread and jeopardy have been completely removed. If you want a *Robotron* update, (twin)stick with *Nex Machina*. **4/10**

BLACK WIDOW: RECHARGED



A novel early take on the twin-stick shooter, *Black Widow* puts you in control of the eponymous spider, and you must defend yourself and your web from attacking bugs. Kind of an Arachnotron, if you will. The action is fast and frantic, with bugs swarming at you from all angles, but thankfully, there's a visual cue before they enter the web, so as long as you keep your wits about you, you can survive. This one stays true to the original graphical style, throwing in the weapons pickups found in the *Asteroids* and *Centipede* updates. Like those games, *Black Widow: Recharged* is a thoroughly successful modern adaptation of a game that probably slipped through the cracks in 19xx. **8/10**

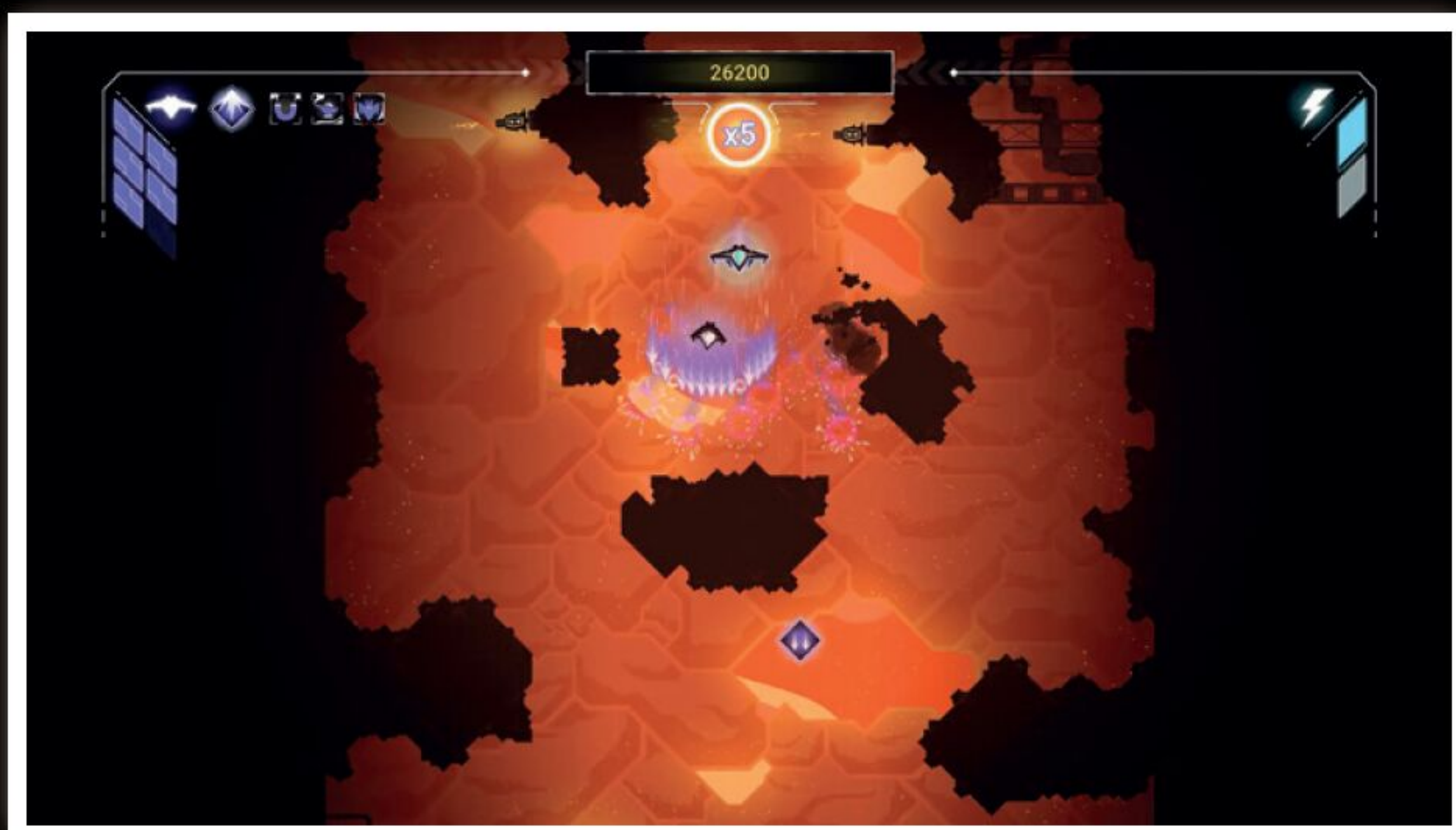
BREAKOUT: RECHARGED



Breakout has already been recharged many times, most notably through the *Arkanoid* series, so this was always going to be a tricky one to update in a way that would feel fresh or different. But you know what? They've done a pretty decent job. Unfortunately, control is by way of stick only. I feel that they've missed a trick

by not allowing the DualSense's touchpad to be used in lieu of a paddle or spinner, as I reckon it could have replicated the feel quite nicely. Still, you do get a nice feeling of being able to control where you're putting the ball, and the challenges and weapons pickups are well-designed and varied enough that you feel they've made the most of the formula. Once you've finished the challenges, though, you will likely lose interest as the main game is still *Breakout*, no matter what bells and whistles are tacked on. **7/10**

CAVERNS OF MARS: RECHARGED



I'd never heard of this until Llamasoft released *Caverns of Minos* on the iPhone, at which point I investigated to see which game they'd based *Minos* on and discovered the original was released on the Atari 800. That explains why I'd never heard of it, then. The object of the original was to descend each cavern, set off a bomb at the bottom, then speed back up to the surface to make your escape. The problem with this version is that you don't have to return to the surface, which reduces half the jeopardy in the game and means you can pick up every item you see, rather than having to strategically plan and save some for your ascent. It's a shame, because it feels great to play, but one of the most important gameplay elements is inexplicably missing, and if half the game is missing, then so is half the score. **5/10**

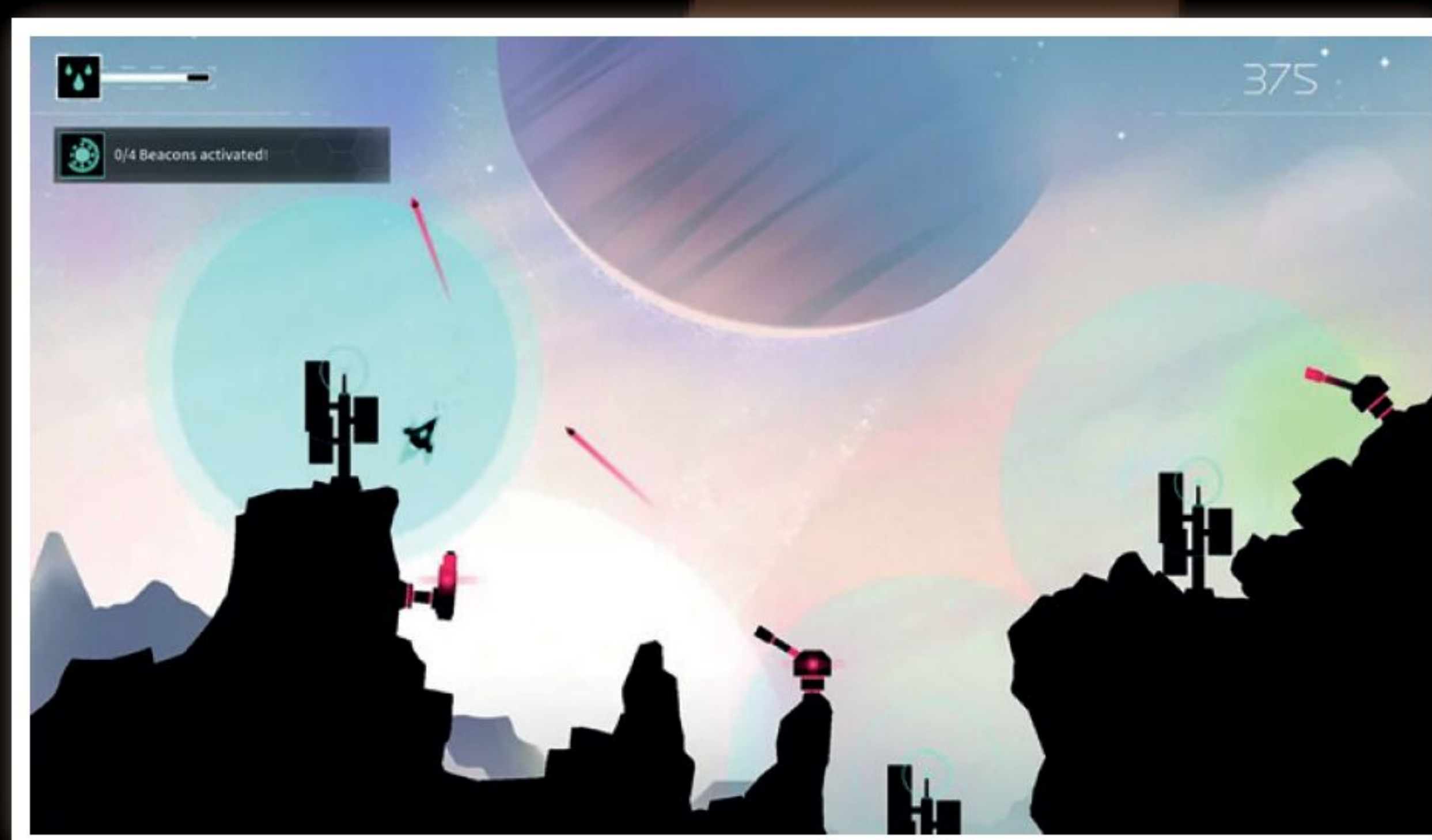
CENTIPEDE: RECHARGED

Like many of these other updates, Atari has blessed you with an array of weaponry here, so instead of firing your weedy one-shot peashooter at the marauding critters, you can pick up and unleash all manner of devastating projectiles. To make up for that, they throw more of those critters at you – bring 'em on! The variety they've been able to impart into the



challenges is really quite impressive; you'd never have imagined there could be so many different things to do within a *Centipede* playfield! The vector-style graphics do feel a bit odd in this one; I'm not sure if that was the right choice for a game about insects and mushrooms. Other than that, this is a very nice reworking, and one where you'll regularly return to the classic game after you've finished all the challenges. **8/10**

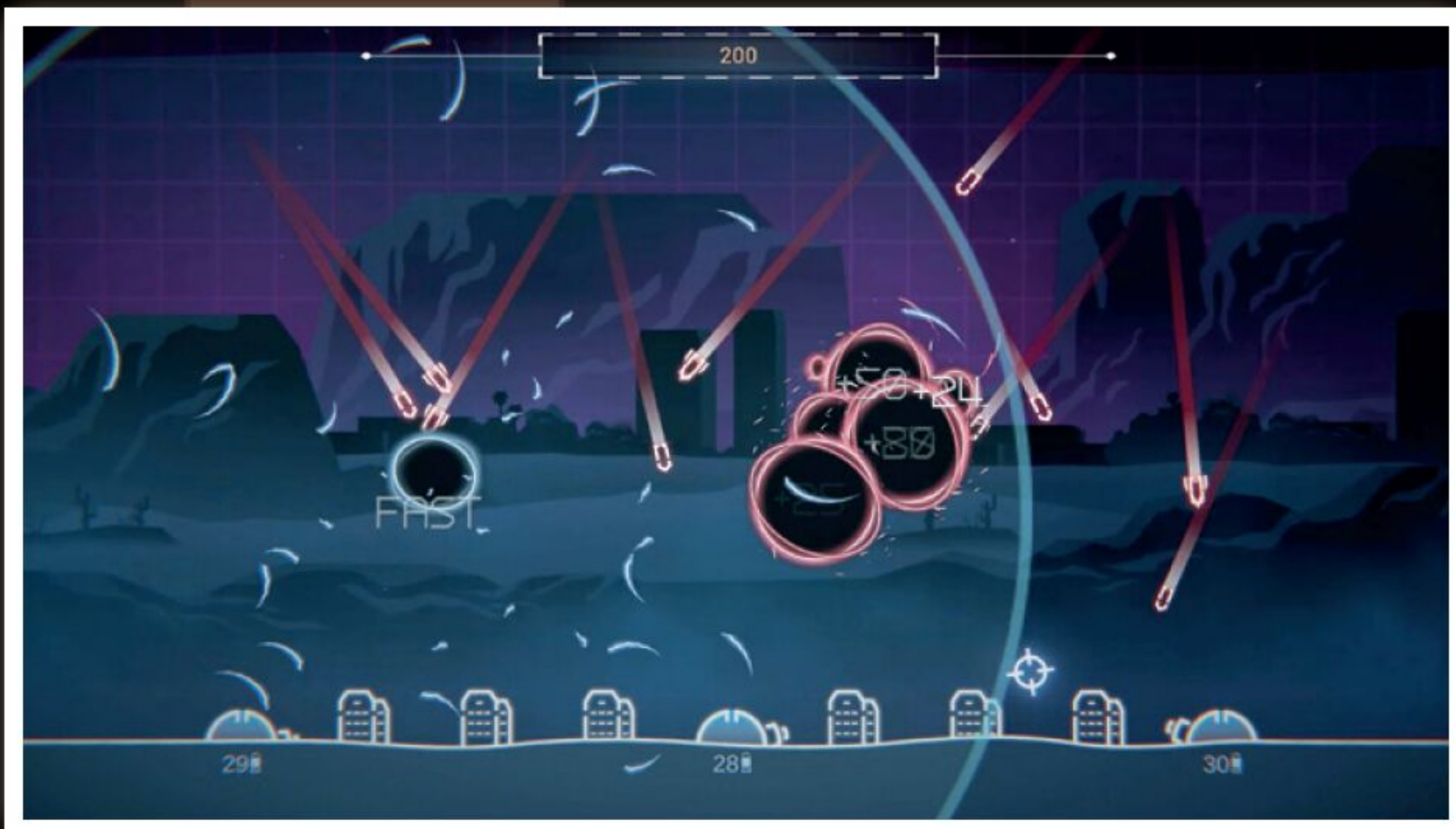
GRAVITAR: RECHARGED



Gravitar is, sadly, lesser known among gamers, although those who do know it think of it fondly. This remake plays more like the computer classic *Thrust*, which is by no means a bad thing. The mission objectives are varied, although the actual tasks do repeat often, albeit with different landscape layouts. I actually had more fun trying to complete the "arcade" version, but it's all very enjoyable. Curiously, *Gravitar* originally had vector graphics, so they've taken it in the opposite direction for this release, but it looks very stylish, and the new graphics definitely work well. Of all the *Recharged* games released so far, this one feels most like a home game, and probably fares best in its transition. **8/10**

MISSILE COMMAND: RECHARGED

I've always found *Missile Command* to be one of the hardest of the classic arcade games, and



(lamentedly, for me) this doesn't make it a whole lot easier. It's simpler to actually play, as you only have one fire button, with the game choosing which turret fires depending on where on the screen your crosshair is located. This means your brain is 66.6% less frazzled than it is when you play the original *Missile Command*. All the other features are present and correct: planes fly by, which can be downed, nasty homing bugs will try to evade your shots, but there are additions such as tanks on the ground, and (of course) extra weapons to pick up, some of which are not that good. I think this is a game you're either good at, or you're not. I'm not, which probably colours my judgement somewhat. Add one to the score if you enjoy the original. **6/10**

QUANTUM: RECHARGED



Quantum is an obscure old arcade game where you use a trackball to whizz a little ball, or probe, around on the screen, attempting to surround enemy particles with your trail in order to capture them. In this revision, they've changed the gameplay so that you create loops near enemies to draw them in and destroy them. In doing so, they've changed the feel of the game, and not for the better. I also feel like this is another game where they've missed a trick by not using the controller's touchpad as a control method. Part of the joy in playing *Quantum* is the feel of the controls, and even on an emulator, a

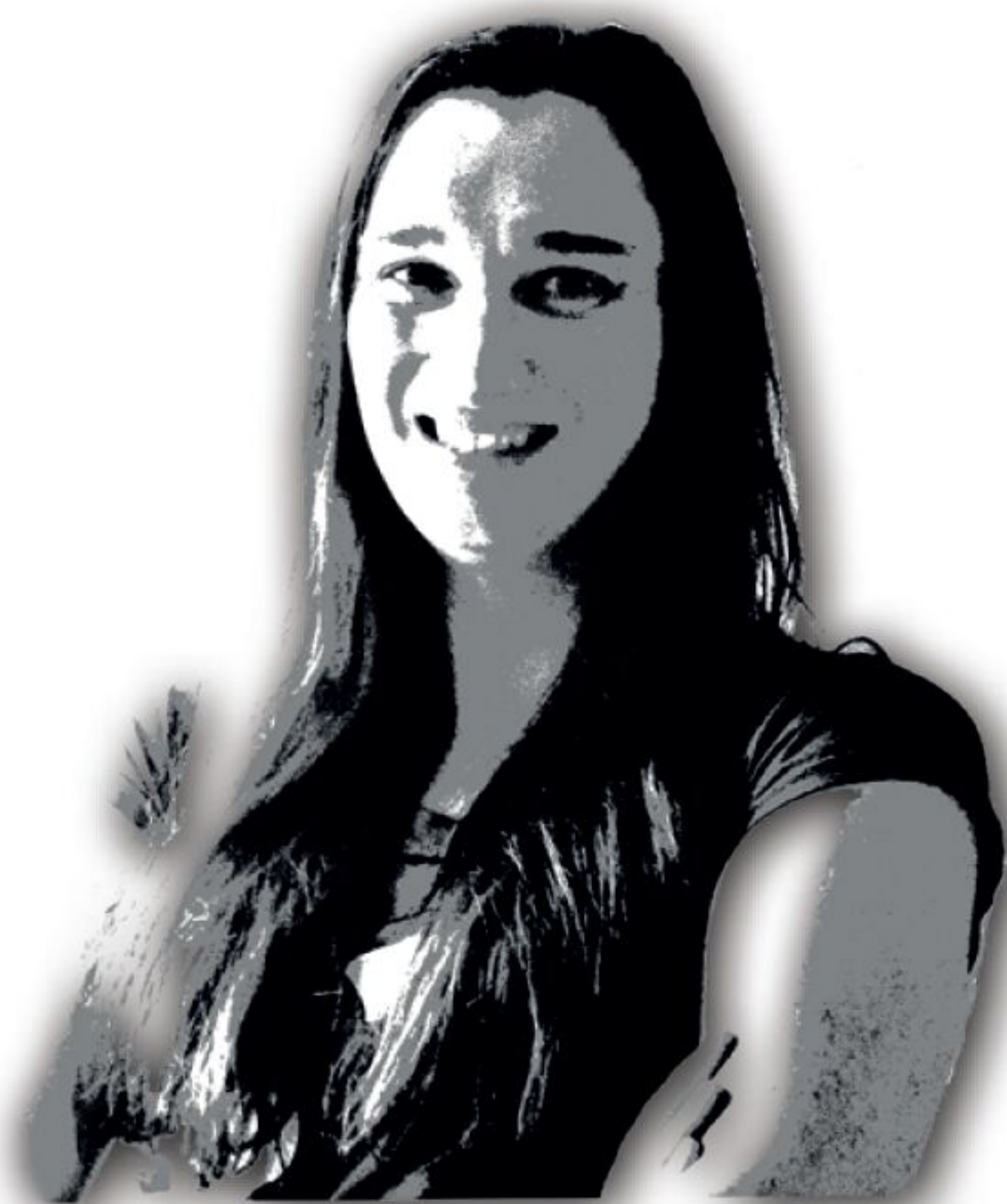
mouse does almost as good a job. It doesn't feel right using a stick, even with the dash function that's been added. In fact, it felt more like I was playing *Geometry Wars* than *Quantum*. That's not necessarily a bad thing, and it certainly has its fun moments, but it's not quite what I was hoping for. **6/10**

YARS: RECHARGED



I must confess, I never really got on with *Yars' Revenge*, and at first, this update didn't click with me, either. In fact, after playing the Arcade mode, I was all set to give it the lowest score of these ten games. It was only once I got into the challenges that the game made more sense. It also became a LOT more challenging! I'm OK with that! I enjoy a stern challenge, and relearning the game from scratch to take them all on has proven somewhat refreshing. As with almost all the games, the core gameplay is similar in every challenge, but completing each level is interesting to work out, and satisfying once you've done it. Will you like this one? Yarrrrrrr! **8/10**

It's fair to say that some of these *Recharged* versions are more successful than others. However, importantly, with all of them, it feels like Atari has Recharged itself. They should be commended for taking their old classics and dragging them up to date for a modern audience. Although a couple of the games are disappointing due to the gameplay choices they've made, none of them is a dead loss, and Atari have priced them very sensibly at £7.39 (\$9.99 if you're in the USA). It's easy to build up a complete collection, especially as they're regularly discounted heavily in the sales, meaning you can hold off on picking up one of the ones you're less sure about until it's a couple of quid. After years of travesty and disaster, it feels as though Atari has rediscovered its soul. ■



**in good
faith**

I recently reviewed a nifty little device called mClassic for our website. Its basic function is to breathe new life into older consoles by redrawing the graphics and upscaling them up to 4K resolution. Using the product got me thinking about

the longevity of our old tech and how much weight we should put on new products that try to combine our old retro world with modern tech.

The great thing about playing old games is that there are so many ways to do it these days. You can buy a simple emulation box, such as a licensed mini, that allows you to play pretty much anything old with all the convenience of simply plugging it into a modern TV via HDMI. This solution is easy to set up and will usually be relatively cost-efficient. Another way is to use emulation on a PC or laptop. In fact, this way is so convenient that almost any old game can be

played directly on a browser simply by searching for it. I recently played *Jetpac* on my PC without the need to install anything. The browser even recognised my Xbox controller, and I was blasting away on the Speccy version in a matter of seconds.

Then there is the middle ground, using the original consoles combined with clever SD card readers and HDMI solutions that give access to everything while maintaining that real, authentic feeling of the original hardware. This solution is the best of both worlds but may require modding the console, investing in expensive adapters, or scouring the seedy world of the interwebs for illegal ROMs. The alternative is to invest money, and possibly time, in tracking down the original carts and discs and playing them through a proper old-school CRT TV to get the purist of experiences. Using this last method may be the de facto way to get that nostalgia pumping, but



it got me thinking about how long we can expect this to last.

I have several CRT TV sets in my house, and while all still function, I know that at some point, they will go “Pop!”. I recently lost an old friend - a 21-inch Toshiba. It was a beast of a telly that I have used since the late 90s, and it hurt watching it being thrown in the dump. It had a pixel-perfect display with that warm glow that sang to my inner being, and it felt like a plunging dagger to my heart when the inevitable pop and sizzle happened.

Okay, I’m being a bit dramatic, and at the end of the day, I brought another large CRT down from the loft to replace it, but that one will be gone at some point, too. It brings me to the question of what we will do when all our old tellies, consoles, carts, and discs simply stop working. Will anyone in future generations care? Should we invest in modern solutions like upscalers and classic game collections for the Switch or Evercade?

The answer may be a hybrid of the old world and the new one. I try to play my original games as little as possible in some misguided attempt to keep them alive forever. For all the care I take, I noticed disc rot on a game in my collection recently and knew that there was little point in paying the premium to replace it. Why spend the extra money on another disc that would eventually rot away when I can turn on my PC and emulate the heck out of anything I want? In some instances, the emulation can be better than the real thing. Some of the classic collections I’ve reviewed recently have opened my eyes

to the fact that if a game company takes care to preserve its back catalogue, we will have access to those games forever. It also means that younger gamers have an opportunity to discover them.

Sometimes, publishers add exciting new features, one example being the latest round of Toaplan shooters resurrected by BitWave Studios. These new releases of some of the most iconic arcade shooters in history come with options to tweak the difficulty and controls, along with save states and all sorts of other benefits. Some gamers will scream that classic games should be played as originally intended and not tampered with. I’m all for that, as sometimes, tinkering with the game too much will eradicate what made it great in the first place. But the harsh reality is that one day, original hardware will break down - beyond repair and all we’ll have left is emulation. I’m sure most of us will find ways to keep our old consoles going for as long as possible, but will the next generation? Will they care enough to keep our retro dreams alive?

I recently purchased an upscaler based on the popular OSSC design, and its ability to output images to a modern gaming monitor is brilliant. It means I can play all my old consoles alongside my PC and not worry about swapping cables around each time I want to play. All I need to do now is click a button. It’s funny playing a Mega Drive on the same monitor that I play *Starfield* on at over-the-top refresh rates. I’m enjoying the convenience these new gadgets give us for playing retro games.

One thing I did many years ago when I first thought about a bleak future without working consoles was to ensure I had spares of all my favourite consoles. I have a brand-new GameCube and Dreamcast stored away for that time when my originals go to retro heaven. I’ve also started to buy SD card solutions for all my cart-based systems to keep my collection from being overused. Next, I’ll work through the disc-based consoles to get them future-proofed with SD card readers.

For now, however, I’m enjoying the fact I can still play my old consoles on an old TV, and

I’ll keep reliving those memories in the most authentic way I can. I’ll worry about what happens next when I have to - Long live the CRT! ■

LET'S TALK RETRO



GAMES FLASHBACK Festive Special

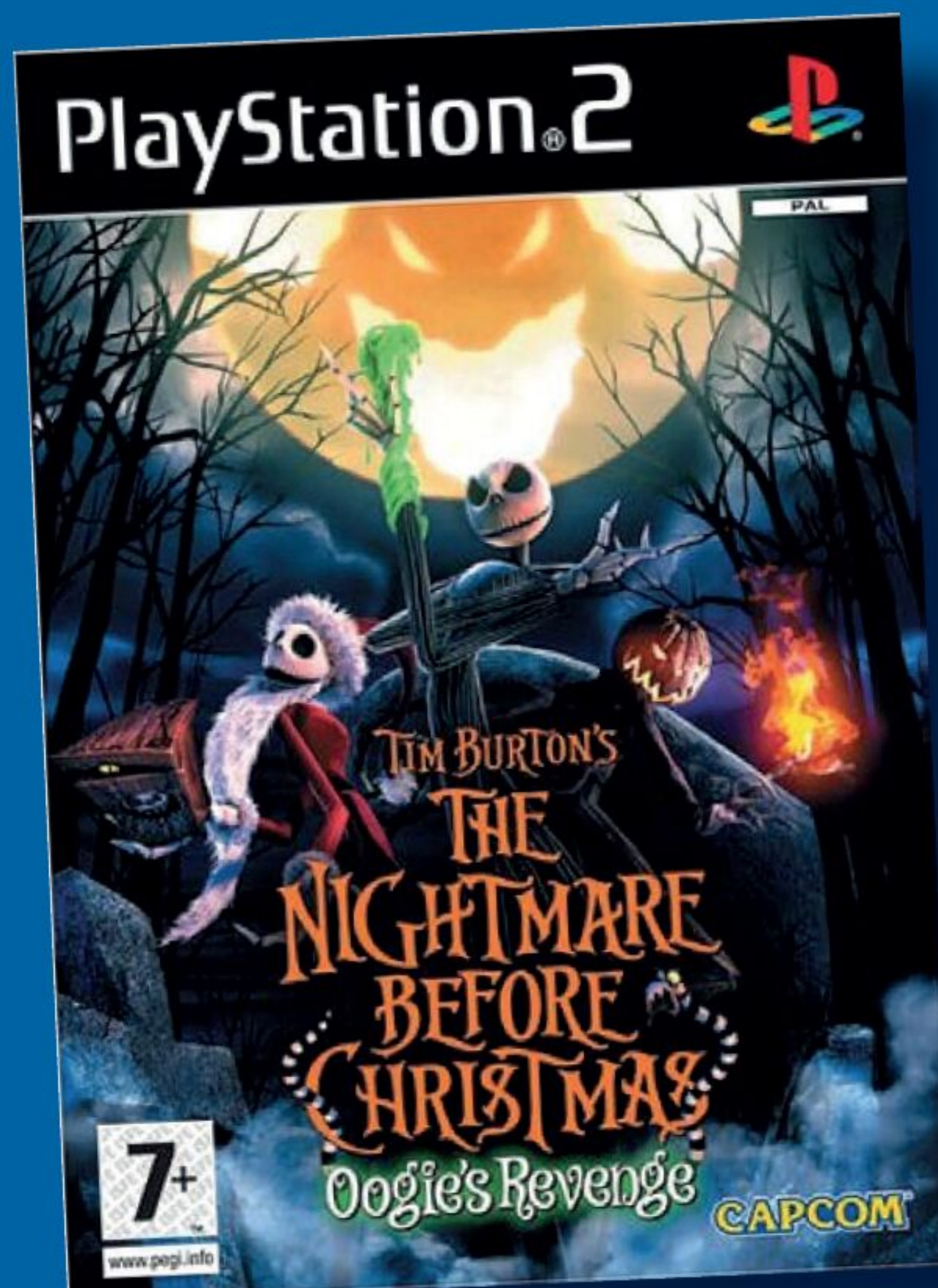
COLIN AND JAMES FROM YOUTUBE'S LET'S TALK RETRO CHANNEL PUT THE DELOREAN IN THE GARAGE UNTIL NEXT YEAR AND BREAK OUT THE SLEIGH FOR CHRISTMAS!

COLIN:

As a certain Noddy Holder likes to remind us each and every year, "IT'S CHRISTMAAS!" So, for this Games Chart Flashback, James and I have decided to take a trip back to Christmas past and look at some of the festive-themed games that have been released over the years. And to be honest, there aren't as many as you might think, but we have managed to find and agree on a top five, which unfortunately has left James with a bit of a nightmare (what a great lead-in, even if I say so myself).

JAMES:

Twas the Night-mare Before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. That's because Xbox and PS2 owners had a Tim Burton-inspired video game to get stuck into - *The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge*.

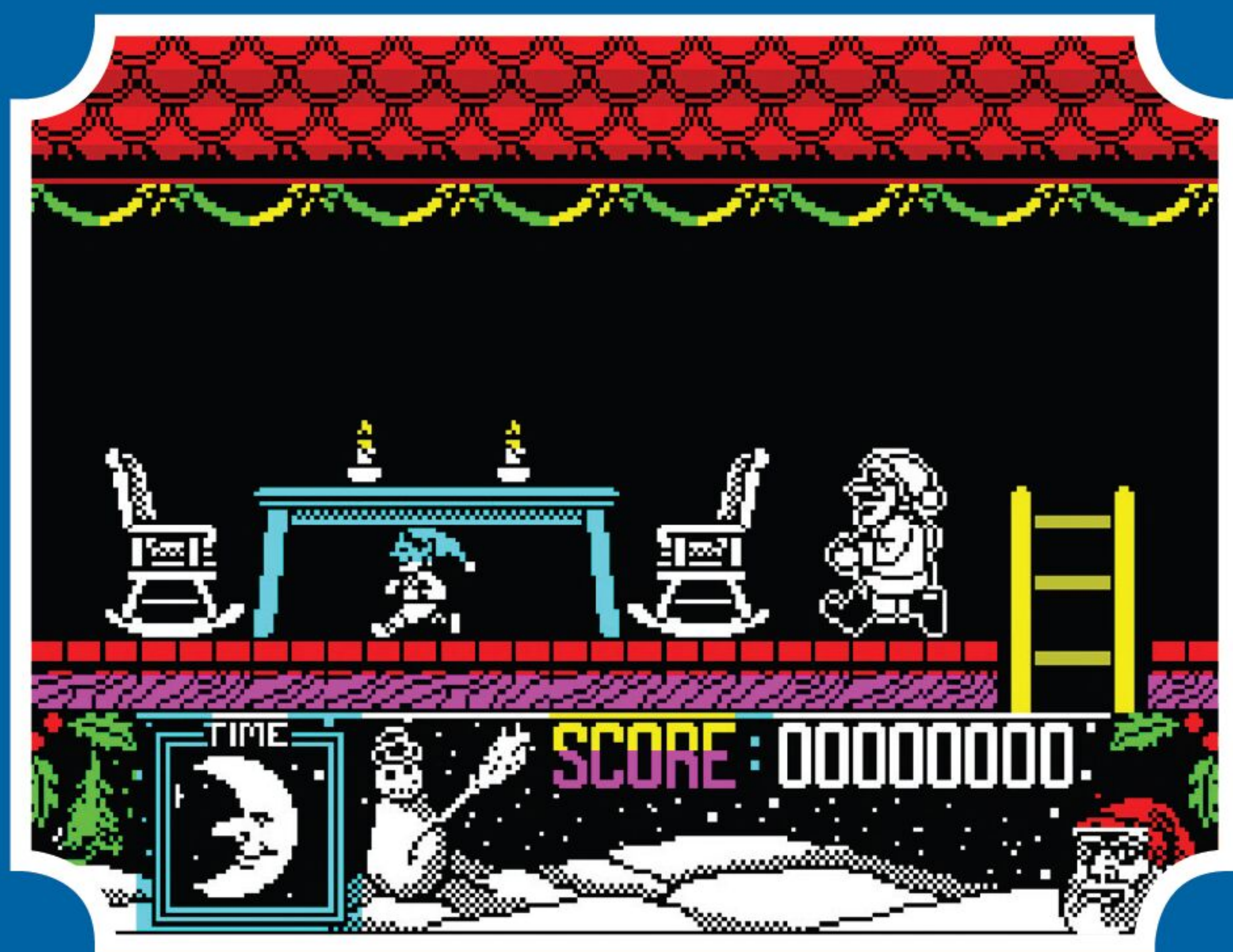


Fans of the 1993 smash movie will love how this game nailed the artistic style and feel of the movie. Ultimately, it's a beat 'em-up with boss fights, great music and excellent voice acting. However, I think you have to be a big fan of the movie to love this.

COLIN:

Okay, so if we're being honest, this game should probably be at number five in this chart, but as I'm our resident C64 expert, it's snuck in at number four. That said, I have some warm, nostalgic Christmas memories of playing *The Official Father Christmas* on my C64 during the build-up to Christmas in 1989. The game was also released on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC by Alternative Software and was sold in aid of the Save the Children Fund. In

the game, it's Christmas Eve, and you play as Santa getting ready to deliver presents to children all over the world. The first level has you searching for and collecting parts of your sleigh that your mischievous elves have hidden around your house. You must dodge your elves as you collect the pieces because if you bump into them, they steal back the sleigh part you are carrying. Once you have collected all the pieces and rebuilt your sleigh, the second level begins by selecting six presents.



Above: *The Official Father Christmas* (ZX Spectrum).

You must try to catch those six presents as they drop into your grotto. Finally, once all the presents have been loaded onto your sleigh, the third level has you dropping the presents down chimneys by parachute as you try to dodge clouds, birds, and aeroplanes. You're treated to chiptune versions of 'Jingle Bells' and 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' as you play. The game is in no way a classic, but in 1989, I remember it kept me entertained and looking forward to Christmas.

JAMES:

At number three in our chart, we have *Santa Clause Junior*, a platformer consisting of 21 levels and released on the Game Boy Colour on the 1st of December 2001. You play as Nick, a spritely young chap, and you guessed it,

that crazy Santa has only gone and lost all the presents before the big day (what a dumbass), and it's your duty to get them back. Game progress is rewarded with a level password system (write them down!). Viewing the Credits reveals photos of the team, and the password for the last level is FQWDPKK. You may have loved or hated getting this on Christmas morning, but either way, it's worth a good wedge on eBay with listings for £150; Happy Christmas, Indeed.

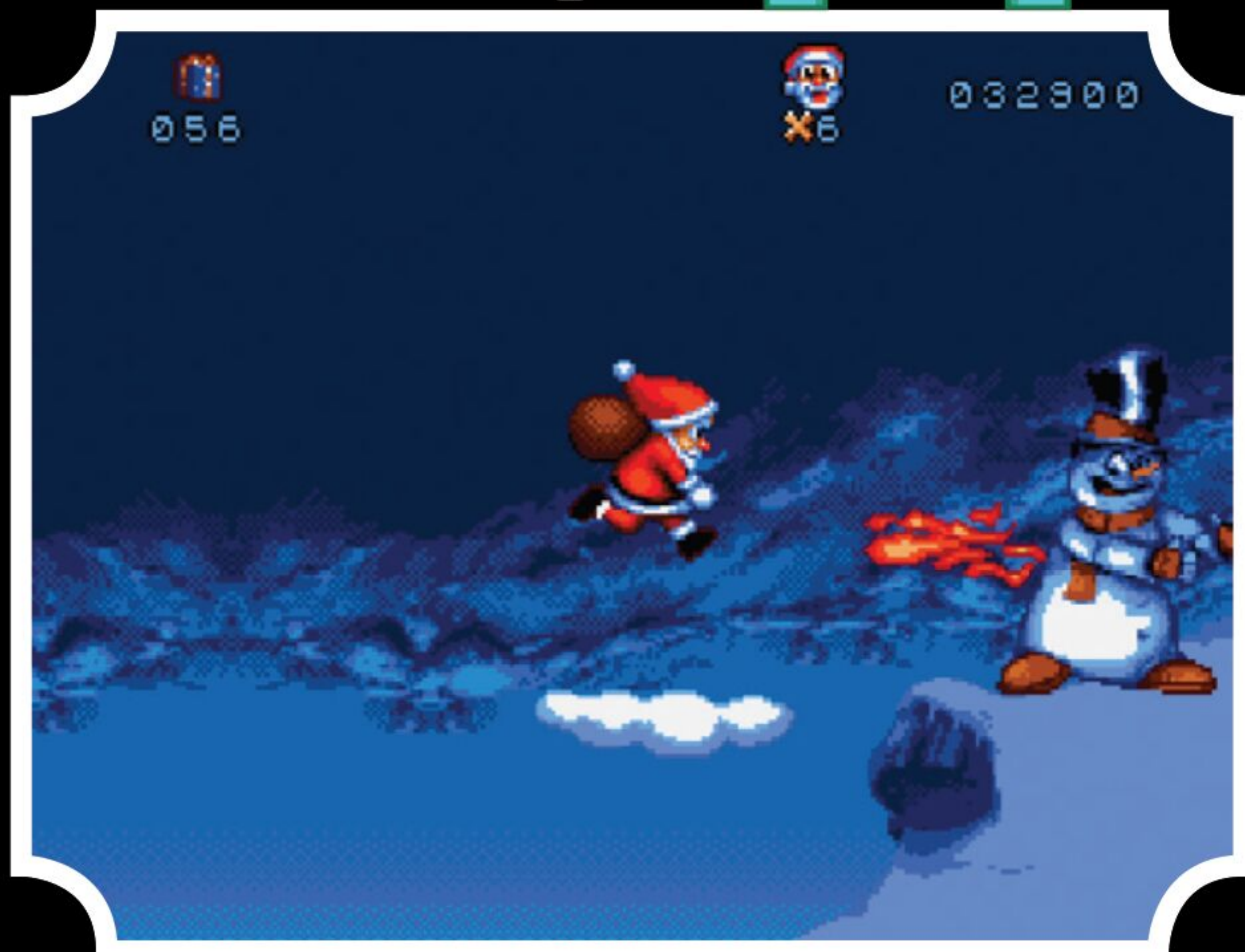
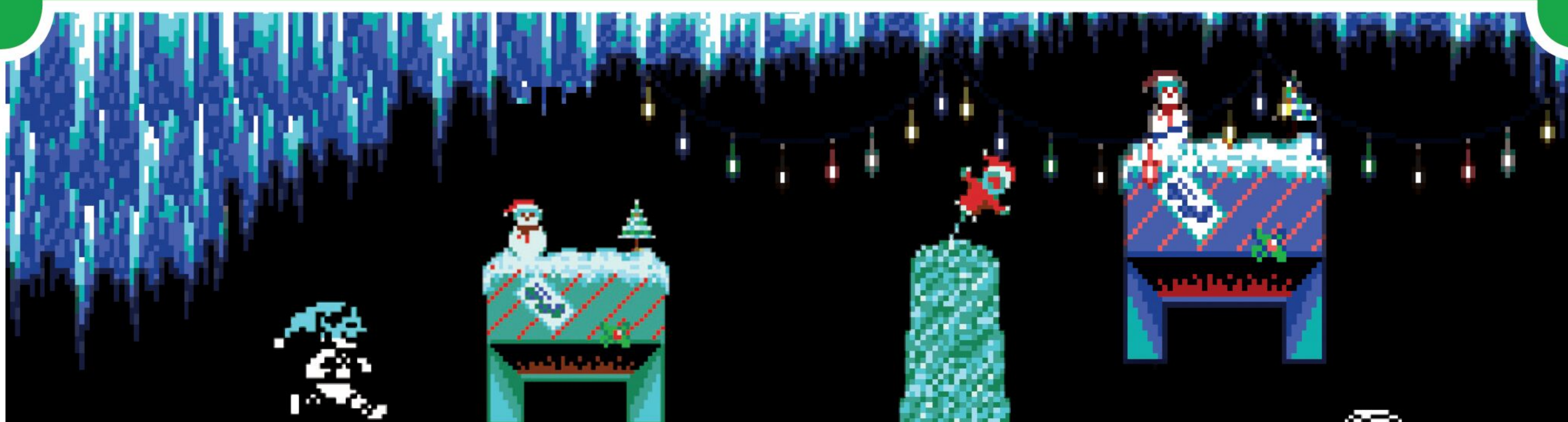
COLIN:

Wow! £150! I'm glad I'm not a dedicated Gameboy Colour collector. Moving on to number 2, we have *Daze Before Christmas*, a fun platformer developed by Funcom and released by Sunsoft in 1994 exclusively in Australia for the Sega Mega

GAMES CHART FLASHBACK FESTIVE SPECIAL EDITION

1. Christmas Lemmings
2. Daze Before Christmas
3. Santa Clause Junior
4. The Official Father Christmas
5. Nightmare Before Christmas





Above: *Daze Before Christmas* (Mega Drive).

Drive. However, a SNES port was released in both Australia and Europe. The game sees you, not surprisingly, playing as Santa once again in a race to save Christmas. This time, an evil mouse steals all the children's presents and curses them with a spell. Using Santa's magic powers, you must turn enemies such as giant rats, evil toys, and snowmen into collectable presents. You can also open other presents that contain things like an extra life, a bomb or an enemy. One of the game's more original ideas is that by drinking a potion (which looks a lot like a cup of tea), you can turn Santa into his evil twin, Anti-Claus, a blue-suited devilish version of himself who is invincible but unable to use magic. At several points during the game, you get to take off on Santa's sleigh, and in a very similar fashion to number four, *Official Father Christmas*, you drop off the presents you have collected down chimneys around the world. Due to this game being supposedly rare and costing a fair bit when copies pop up on eBay, I have only ever played it via the magic of emulation. I've found it a well-rounded game with colourful and well-animated graphics.

JAMES:

And finally, at number one and possibly one of the greatest remakes of a game ever, it's



Above: *Christmas Lemmings* (Amiga).

Christmas Lemmings. DMA / Psygnosis originally released it for the Amiga, Atari ST (Cough), and PC. Also known as *Holiday Lemmings*, it first appeared on cover disks in 1991-92, which featured only a few levels. I had the Amiga Format Issue 30 disk. The clever guys at DMA based in Dundee would release full versions in 1993 and '94, bringing joy to millions of *Lemmings* lovers. Both releases featured a whopping 32 levels filled with snowmen, sparkly lights, and funky Christmas music, with the goal of successfully guiding the Santa-suited lemmings to a Christmas pudding. If you're ever in Dundee, visit the *Lemmings* statues and send us a photo - "Let's Go!"

COLIN:

That about wraps up this special festive edition of Games Chart Flashback. We hope you've enjoyed our little trip back to look at games of Christmas past as much as we have. We look forward to seeing you all again next year to look at more game charts from the past, but until then, we hope that you all eat, drink, and game aplenty. Most of all, have a fantastic Christmas! ■



GUNGRIFFON BLAZE

ANDREW OYSTON LOOKS BACK AT THE MECH-INFUSED PS2 LAUNCH TITLE FROM JAPANESE DEVELOPER GAME ARTS.

■ The *Gungriffon* series had already seen a couple of entries on the Sega Saturn before jumping to the brave new world of Sony's PlayStation 2, coming in as a launch title for that machine's North American debut. Combining a post-World War III setting and Japan's everlasting love of mecha, *Gungriffon Blaze* offered players a chance to answer that famous musical question: Who let the AWGS out?

The Armored Walking Gun System (AWGS), aka giant robot with guns, is your means of bringing peace to the world through superior firepower. Before you get to the action, however,

you need to set up your pilot - including your name, height, weight, blood type, and IQ. They don't actually affect gameplay, but hey, if you want to be the brightest person ever piloting an AWGS, you go for it. The same level of detail can be applied to your AWGS - secondary weapons, as well as additional items, allowing you to maximise specific abilities. These are finite but



Above: The best place to learn the topsy-turvy controls.

can be replaced by battlefield finds, although if you die, you lose your accumulated armoury and skills.

It begins oh so simply with a jaunty little training mission on Guam that provides a much-needed opportunity to get used to the control system. There are a half dozen different options, but the initial scheme will probably be the one you stick with and also the one that might have

you throwing the game in the bin. Most players will be familiar with the now-traditional first-person shooter setup - left to move, right to aim. Not so here. The default is the left stick to aim and the right to move. Yeah - it takes a bit of effort to get used to that, and coming back to this title after twenty years meant a few visits to Guam before I managed to stop inadvertently staring at the ground in a firefight!

Once you've rewired your lizard brain to the controls, you're free to take on the enemy and blow everything up. Guam gives things to you gently, and you'll have great fun collecting pickups from fallen foes and the buildings you've demolished. Careful, though, as there is a time limit, and running out of ammunition will affect your ability to get that all-important high score. Finish a mission with the specified score, and you'll receive better upgrade options and the "Another" missions - rinse and repeat but much more difficult. Not that it needs this, as although you may think that having just five combat missions is a bit stingy, it will take you a long while to finish them the first time around, and



Above: A mech-dust-up in the dunes.



Above: The famous Tibetan "Great Wall of Difficulty" in the second mission. Good Luck!



Above: The pre-mission animation is a treat that never tires.

that's before you start aiming for the suggested score. It's not exactly an even difficulty curve, either - Cape Canaveral is almost a leisurely stroll compared to the second mission, Tibet, where it's akin to running into a brick wall.

That being said, when you have AI friends in support, they do a reasonably good job of aiding you, and it helps if you get to the more powerful weapons - the base machine gun is useless, but the fully upgraded model is a lifesaver. Similarly, when you're in the thick of combat, hits are delivered with a bone-jarring crunch, making the battle a genuinely immersive experience. Even with all of this destruction on-screen, *Gungriffon Blaze* runs smoothly. It appears a tad bare, and the texture work has a Vaseline filter applied, but it does look canny. The sound effects are excellent, yet the music swings from downright depressing piano accompanying a burning AWGS wreck to techno-rock to excite the action [Wait, what is techno-rock? - Ed]. Strangely, the contrast actually works.

Gungriffon Blaze won't appeal to many outside of the mecha brigade. The early PS2 graphics, although with a certain appeal, haven't



Above: Red sky at night, some tanks are alright! Sorry.

aged particularly well, and modern-day players will curse their muscle memory when getting used to the controls. However, the point-scoring challenge is what will keep you returning to your customised pilot and their hulking great war machine despite the game's attempt at a serious storyline. So, maybe you owe yourself the opportunity to give it a go. Second-hand copies are cheap, and if you want to while away a few hours blowing stuff up, there are far worse games to do it in. ■

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BADASS BOSSES

GEORGE STURGEON TELLS US WHY THE ARMoured TROLL FROM *HOGWARTS LEGACY* IS A BADASS FIRST BOSS, AS HE DEFENDS THE VILLAGE OF HOGSMEADE WHILST OUT PURCHASING SCHOOL SUPPLIES - JUST ANOTHER DAY AT HOGWARTS THEN!



■ The Armoured Troll will undoubtedly conjure memories of the Mountain Troll from 2001's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, where Harry and Ron attempt to rescue Hermione from this beast in the Hogwarts toilet block. With a well-placed spell, Harry and Ron execute a heroic rescue in what Professor McGonagall called "sheer dumb luck". In *Hogwarts Legacy*, the inclusion of the Armoured Troll as the first notable test of skill feels like a wonderful nostalgic nod to one of the series' earliest monster encounters.

This boss battle occurs in the quest 'Welcome to Hogsmeade' as the player finishes gathering their school supplies from the shops around the village, only to be ambushed by the Armoured Troll. Together with a fellow student, either Natsai Onai or Sebastian Sallow (depending on the player's choice), the task falls to our Hogwarts student to take down this rampaging menace. Just imagine the House Points!

The Armoured Troll is a club-swinging giant beast that arrives with a fittingly destructive entrance by smashing through a building. As its name implies, this formidable foe is equipped with glowing red armour and a club

PORTKEY GAMES HOGWARTS LEGACY

Boss: Armoured Troll **Chapter:** Welcome To Hogsmeade **Dev:** Avalanche Software
System: PS4/5, Xbox One/Series, Switch, PC **Year:** 2023

Below: Casting the shielding spell, Protego, to block certain attacks.



Above: Sebastian defending you after you take a hit.



Above: Taking advantage of a moment of weakness.

built for wrecking. Moving far quicker than one would first expect, considering its size, the troll will charge toward the player, initiating a fast-paced duel where the core fundamentals of the combat system will need to be quickly understood if they are to prevail.

Despite the lack of hard-hitting spells available at this early point in the game, the Armoured Troll is a well-balanced encounter. The confrontation requires the player to make the most of *Hogwarts Legacy*'s combat system by recognising and exploiting weaknesses in the troll's attack patterns. While the task of defending Hogsmeade from a troll attack so early in the game may seem daunting, it provides the player with an unexpected opportunity to learn and build on the knowledge already bestowed on them by their Hogwarts professors.



Above: The battle tutors the player on the different attack indicators - stay alert!

BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

The encounter with the Armoured Troll is a three-dimensional duel set against Hogsmeade's bustling backdrop and serves as the player's first real test of combat. Until this point in the adventure, the player has had to make do with casting spells with a second-hand wand. However, following a brief shopping trip to Ollivanders, the player is now equipped with a brand-new one, and this surprising encounter provides the perfect opportunity to put it to the test.

The boss begins the battle by rapidly charging towards the player, meaning that our Hogwarts student must dodge at just the right moment. This evasive move causes the troll to slam into the nearby building, stunning it momentarily and allowing the player to attack. It will soon become clear that simply flinging the basic damage spell at this enemy won't make much of an impact and that attacking from afar is critical to survival. The AI partner fighting alongside the player certainly makes this battle feel like a team effort as the two work together to deal damage, discussing their strategy at

key points along the way.

As the troll pressures our Hogwarts student to stay on the move, the player's confidence will build as weaknesses in its combat strategy are uncovered. The player will notice that many of the troll's attacks are denoted by either a red or gold indicator. Attacks with a red indicator must be avoided, and only a dodge manoeuvre will suffice, as being caught by one of these attacks will throw our Hogwarts student from one end of Hogsmeade to the other.

However, should the player see a golden indicator during battle, a reactive cast of the shield spell, 'Protego', will repel the attack and provide an opening to counter with the spell, 'Stupefy'. It's at this point where things start to get interesting. While combos of the primary damage spell will continue to whittle away at the troll's seemingly gargantuan health bar - a screen prompt to use the 'Ancient Magic Throw' reveals a much more powerful addition to the player's skill set. By surveying the



surroundings, they'll now be able to interact with pieces of the environment and, with a flick of the wand, launch the plentiful supply of nearby barrels and boxes in the vicinity right into the rampaging troll's face. Not only is this the best way of dealing damage to the Armoured Troll, it feels immensely satisfying and looks incredibly stylish.

Amidst the battle, combatants should also keep an eye on their AI partner as they deploy various spells that the Hogwarts student will eventually learn over the course of the game. As frustrating as it is that the player doesn't already possess this skill set, it's this very lack of ability that gives this battle an ominously threatening feel. Once the player has perfected their attack strategy and dealt enough damage, a cinematic cutscene asks the player to invoke one last cast of Ancient Magic. With

a quick swish and flick, the Armoured Troll disintegrates spectacularly.

While the Hogwarts professors actively encourage putting your spellcasting into action, we doubt that a daring duel with an Armoured Troll was quite what they had in mind. Whether you're tackling this boss with the bravery of a Gryffindor, the patience of a Hufflepuff, the wits of a Ravenclaw, or the resourcefulness of a student from Slytherin, the Armoured Troll is an opponent that is not to be taken lightly. Unless, of course, you want to be in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing drinking something other than Pumpkin Juice to regrow your bones.

With only a limited set of spells, the battle with this Badass First Boss is an exercise of higher education, requiring the player to put their basic combat knowledge to the test. Mischief managed! ■



Above: Celebrating a Troll takedown with a well-earned Butterbeer at The Three Broomsticks.



Above: The aftermath of the Armoured Troll attack reveals new villains.



toy polloi

ARE TOYS GOING OUT OF FASHION?

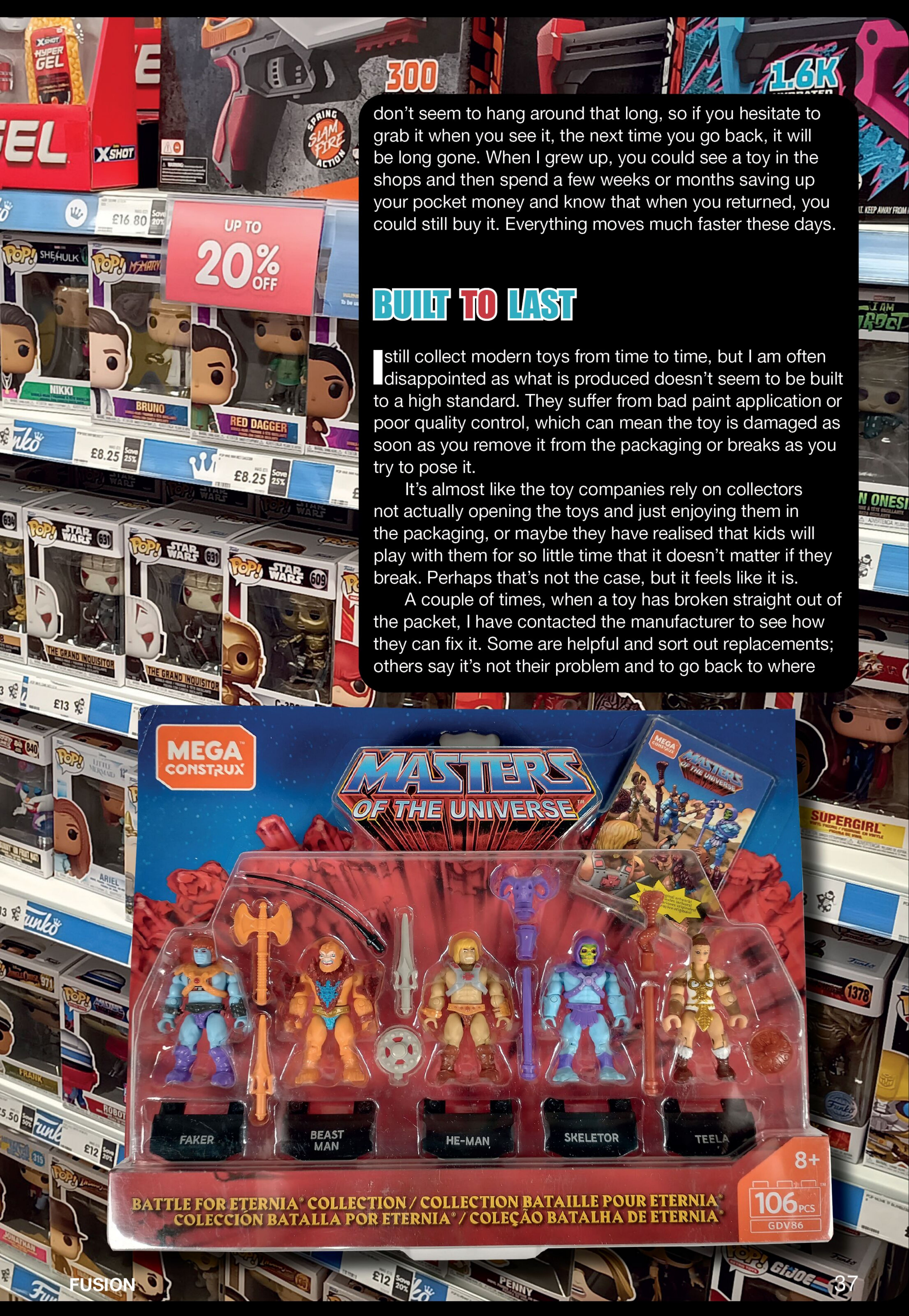
■ This is one of those questions I often ponder when I walk around the shops. There seem to be very few places to buy toys on the high streets now, certainly down where I reside. Supermarkets often have a small toy aisle with a selection that consists of some old classics and easy sellers like Lego and Barbie, and the rest is filled with the current hot favourites that will soon be gone as the fashions change. If you live in a bigger town, you might be lucky and have an Entertainer store or out-of-town Smyths Toys. There are still a few Toy Masters and other independent toy shops around, but small independent toy shops are getting rarer and rarer.

Gone are the days of having a few rows of toys at the supermarket to browse through while Mum does the food shopping (sexist, I know, but I grew up in the 70s, and that was what happened). I clearly remember being taken to a two-storey Tesco that had the food

department downstairs, with the upstairs filled with clothing, house goods, and a couple of aisles of toys. This was my main source of toys growing up; I loved going there at any opportunity and spending my pocket money. I have toys in my collection now that I can remember getting from those aisles. Many of my Return of the Jedi-era Star Wars figures came from there, including Ree-Yees, a figure I love to this day, and a good selection of the Advanced Dungeons and Dragons figures by LJN. How I wish I still had the Shield Shooter Ogre King I picked up one weekend. The Tesco store is still in the same place, but the upper floor is now a gym.

Nowadays, to me at least, it seems that kids grow up far quicker and have many more things given to them to play with - any toys they own have a very short play lifespan. When I was young, we got very few new toys, so every toy we managed to get became very precious. For kids now, getting a toy doesn't seem like such a big event; before you know it, the toys have been pushed aside and replaced with tablets, computers, and the like.

Toys that are out in the shops these days



don't seem to hang around that long, so if you hesitate to grab it when you see it, the next time you go back, it will be long gone. When I grew up, you could see a toy in the shops and then spend a few weeks or months saving up your pocket money and know that when you returned, you could still buy it. Everything moves much faster these days.

BUILT TO LAST

I still collect modern toys from time to time, but I am often disappointed as what is produced doesn't seem to be built to a high standard. They suffer from bad paint application or poor quality control, which can mean the toy is damaged as soon as you remove it from the packaging or breaks as you try to pose it.

It's almost like the toy companies rely on collectors not actually opening the toys and just enjoying them in the packaging, or maybe they have realised that kids will play with them for so little time that it doesn't matter if they break. Perhaps that's not the case, but it feels like it is.

A couple of times, when a toy has broken straight out of the packet, I have contacted the manufacturer to see how they can fix it. Some are helpful and sort out replacements; others say it's not their problem and to go back to where



TRADING CARDS

Trading cards were a big part of my school life growing up in the 70s and 80s; swapping and trading them with your friends in the playground was great fun. It's still happening today, which is great to see with kids collecting Pokemon cards and the like. There is something to be said for having a physical item in your hand, be it a toy or pack of cards. The tactile feel of them, the smell of the print, and the way they look. These feelings will be ones you remember for a very long time so I hope that future generations will be able to enjoy that. Virtual cards and collectables may not be able to give you those memories.



it was purchased, which can be tricky if I've picked it up online or at a toy fair. This attitude has put me off buying new toys as I would rather buy older toys that seem to have been made to be played with for more than a few minutes.

COLLECTING IN THE FUTURE

Looking at what I and others collect now, it's all about those toys we had growing up and the memories and nostalgia they bring back to us. Seeing kids now who play on their tablets, collecting virtual characters and cards, will they be able to look back as we are now at these virtual things? Will they still even exist in any form that can be looked at?

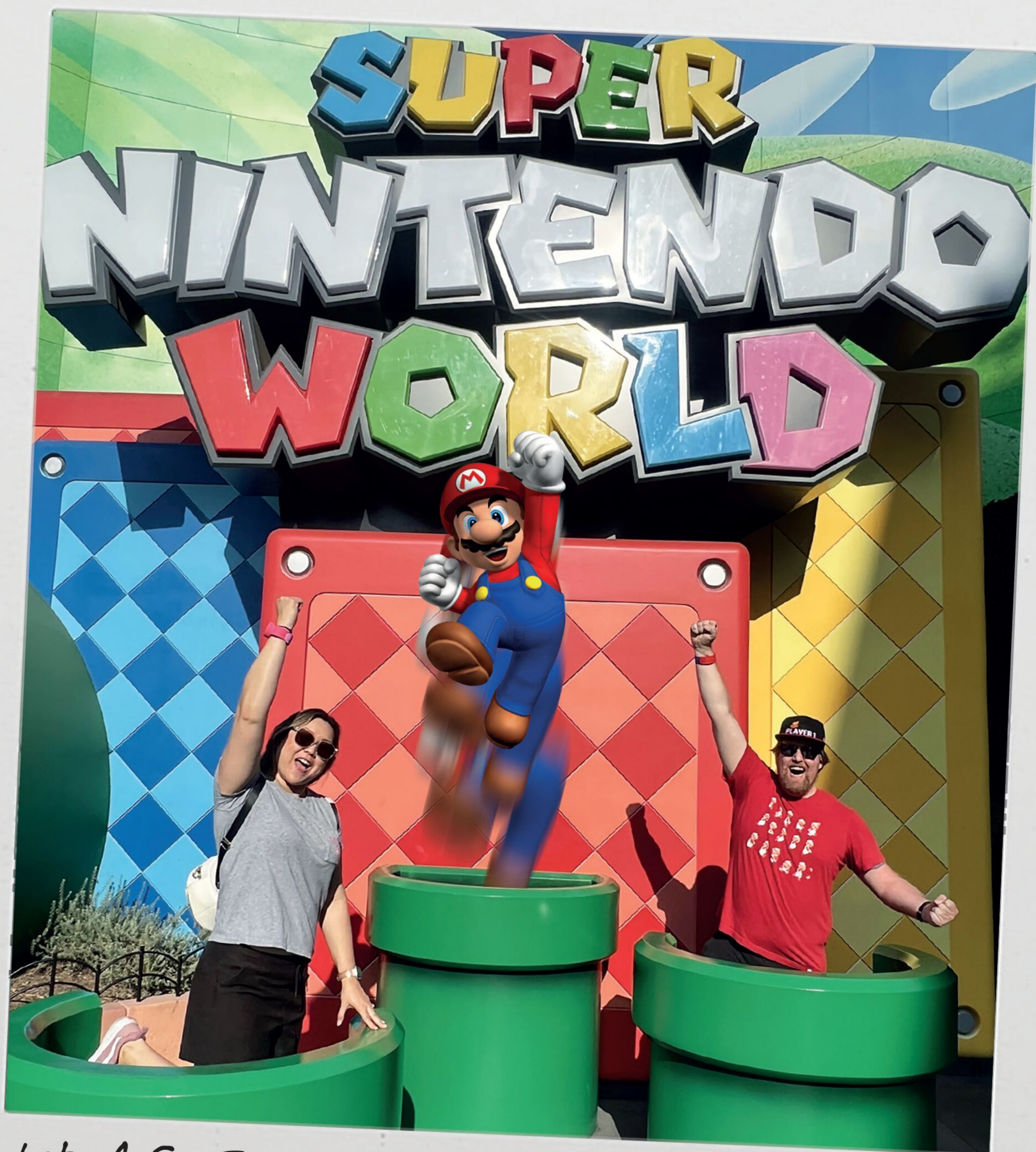
The same could be said for music, as many young people download or stream without buying physical media. I always loved, and still do, reading the notes and lyrics on

albums the same way I like looking at the old card backs for action figures. Are we heading for a generation of people who will miss out on the ability to look back at their childhoods and enjoy reliving them as we do now? I really hope not, but it certainly looks that way.

There is clearly still a market for toys, but the age at which children grow out of playing with them is getting lower, and I feel that is a great shame. Hopefully, the hay day of toys is not over, as what I enjoyed growing up still gives me and many others a tremendous amount of enjoyment in adult life. It's a great way of escaping the troubles of the day, and I look forward to going into my toy room to play with my old toys. ■



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Lets-A-Go To Super Nintendo World Hollywood!

Ben Magnet reports from inside
a green pipe somewhere in the
Mushroom Kingdom.



Super Nintendo World has finally made it to the United States at Universal Studios Hollywood, and in the past months since officially opening, the hype has yet to slow down. I had been waiting patiently to experience this, and on July 29th 2023, I finally made the trip. As I walked through the warp pipe and entered Peach's castle, I had a child-like wonder I hadn't felt in years. I soon realised this newest addition to Universal Hollywood was really something else.

Instantly, I felt I had been transported into the world of *Super Mario*. I totally believed I was in the video game! The animatronics throughout Super Nintendo World Hollywood created character movement indistinguishable from the video games, and I found the attention to detail quite impressive. Walking through the themed lands, I heard familiar coin *dings* and 'level complete' sounds. Meeting Mario, Luigi, Peach, and even Toad completed my theme park experience.

Super Nintendo World Hollywood has a spacing problem. As a result, the park is limited in size, and compared to Super Nintendo World Japan, it is relatively small. Universal Studios Hollywood is a fully functional and working film studio, and one of its draws is the Studio Tour, where guests can see sets from their favourite films and television shows. Consequently, an older attraction or show is often replaced when a new interest or theme park is built and very little space was available for Super Nintendo World. Super Nintendo World Japan is much larger, with two rides and a Donkey Kong expansion being constructed to add a new roller coaster and expand the park even further. Meanwhile, due to limited space, Super Nintendo World Hollywood only has one ride, some mini-games, and a restaurant.

I was fully aware of the park's drawbacks before visiting, so what drew me here? Well, that one ride I mentioned is one of the most extraordinary experiences I've ever had. With Mario Kart Bowser's Challenge, the park



*There he is, real as they come.
If it bleeds, we can Kill it.*



*A picture that anyone reading
this can probably Rear.*



Luigi strides through the Kingdom with his entourage, like the gangster he is.



Peach's castle, where the princess looks down upon the peasants below.



Five watches and not one person with the ability to tell the actual time.

creators were tasked with bringing Mario Kart from the TV screen to the real world. I am a massive *Mario Kart* fan, and I firmly believe that Universal nailed it. While this is a ride, it must also be stated that it's a GAME!

Riders are given comfortable headbands and augmented reality goggles, which attach to the ride vehicles with a satisfying click. The ride looks great, and the AR characters make a difference. It's an engaging dark ride with great sets and scenery, immersed in a live-action video game. Mario Kart Bowser's Challenge is the closest (and safest) we can get to playing *Mario Kart* in real life. You genuinely feel like you're in a *Mario Kart* race!

The game aspect of the ride is incredible. The goal is to collect 100 coins while you race with Team Mario and Team Bowser on a course that's the greatest hits of past *Mario Kart* tracks. The tricky part is getting the aiming for your shells right, as your line of sight dictates where each shot goes. (Thankfully, you get a mini practice round before the ride starts.) Shells come to you through Question Blocks on the course, and there are hidden characters and other blocks to hit, which earn you more coins.

Below: A cherished video game world brought to life or capitalism at it's finest? Answers on a postcard!



While the sets are incredible and Mario Kart Bowser's Challenge is a fantastic experience, there is one other thing that Super Nintendo World Hollywood totally gets right. With a whole park based on video games, Universal have done everything they can to make you feel like you really are in a giant video game.

But it could have offered so much more to keep visitors interested. Sure, there are some areas where you can explore, play with your surroundings, and relax under some air conditioning to escape the summer heat. But I could only go to the same few Question Blocks so many times until the limited activities started to get stale. Thankfully, investing in a Power-Up band widened the experience. The band gave me a map of Super Nintendo World and an immersive story, which continued as I proceeded through the park.

Bowser Jr. stole the Golden Mushroom from Peach's Castle, and it's up to me to beat three of the four mini-games throughout the land to collect three

Left: If you look into Ben's visor, you can see the Mario Kart ride/game (sort of).



My Brave Friends

You were spectacular!

Thank you for
helping us find the
Golden Mushroom.

We could not have
done it without you.

Peach



Meeting Her Royal Highness; Princess Peach. She's a lovely gal really!



Thankfully, Bowser was not to be found roaming the kingdom, and has in fact been turned to stone.

Keys, challenge Bowser Jr., and get the Golden Mushroom back. The Power-Up band gives entry into key areas, such as Bowser Jr's castle, to get the Golden Mushroom, so it is worth it if you want to experience the park in story mode!

Park visitors are divided into teams determined by which character's Power-Up band they buy, with Leaderboards scattered throughout the park to show team scores. High scores can also be tracked via the Universal Studios app. There are stickers to collect, mini-games to play, and hidden Easter eggs to discover, which add to your score and give you the little 'personal achievement' rush. Even losing these games is fun, and it's refreshing that victory isn't always assured. I was eager to get back in line and try again to win my team more points.

While Super Nintendo World Hollywood can be expensive, I found it was worth getting the Universal Express Pass. This granted us front-of-the-line access to all attractions at Universal (Bowser's Challenge being the only exception). If you plan a big trip to Southern California, I recommend visiting Super Nintendo World Hollywood. For Nintendo fans, it's an experience you'll always remember. ■



ASSASSIN'S CREED MIRAGE

WITH *MIRAGE*, UBISOFT PROMISED A RETURN TO THE ASSASSIN'S CREED OF OLD, WITH GREATER EMPHASIS ON STEALTH AND A MORE STREAMLINED CAMPAIGN. BEN HONEBONE FINDS OUT IF THE ASSASSIN'S BLADE MEETS ITS MARK.

■ The first four AC titles rank among my favourite games, but 2012's *ACIII* was where I left the brotherhood behind. While the story was great, I had no desire to hunt for meat, manage property, or do any other additional tasks that didn't involve simply sneaking around stunning historical locations and assassinating folk. While I've been tempted to jump back into the series many times over the intervening years, it wasn't until Ubisoft themselves returned to the "old ways" that I felt the time was right.

On starting my journey with protagonist Basim, everything felt comfortable and familiar. Any concerns I had about missing out on the last fifty AC games melted away as I relaxed into the familiar control system and parkour



Above: *Mirage* is full of gorgeous views, whether you're on the streets or atop buildings.

physics. The graphics were the only real indication that I was playing a “next-gen” game. Ninth-century Baghdad and the surrounding wilderness are beautifully realised and immediately inviting, and they can be experienced in a 30FPS quality mode or a smooth 60FPS performance mode at the usual cost to visual detail. For the most part, *Mirage* looks great in either mode, and the choice will ultimately come down to personal preference.

You begin Basim's story on the streets of Anbar as a capable thief, haunted by visions of a Jinni (a monster thing). In an attempt to impress the 'Hidden Ones', you and your besty, Nehal, steal a shiny disk artefact they are searching for from the Caliph's palace. When the Caliph catches you in the act, Nehal kills him to save Basim's life, and you both escape. But, the Caliph was in with the big bad Templar Order, and revenge for the theft of the artefact is served quickly with a brutal slaughter at Basim's home in Anbar. Wracked with guilt and on the run, Basim flees into the arms of the Hidden Ones, and a literal “training

montage” follows as he is honed into an assassin under the guidance of the wonderful, gravelly voice of Master Roshan.

What follows is a predictable AC romp through a small period of the Islamic Golden Age, but *Mirage* is all the better for sticking to its simple formula. Sneaking and killing feels just like it did ten or fifteen years ago, and the additional abilities Basim possess make

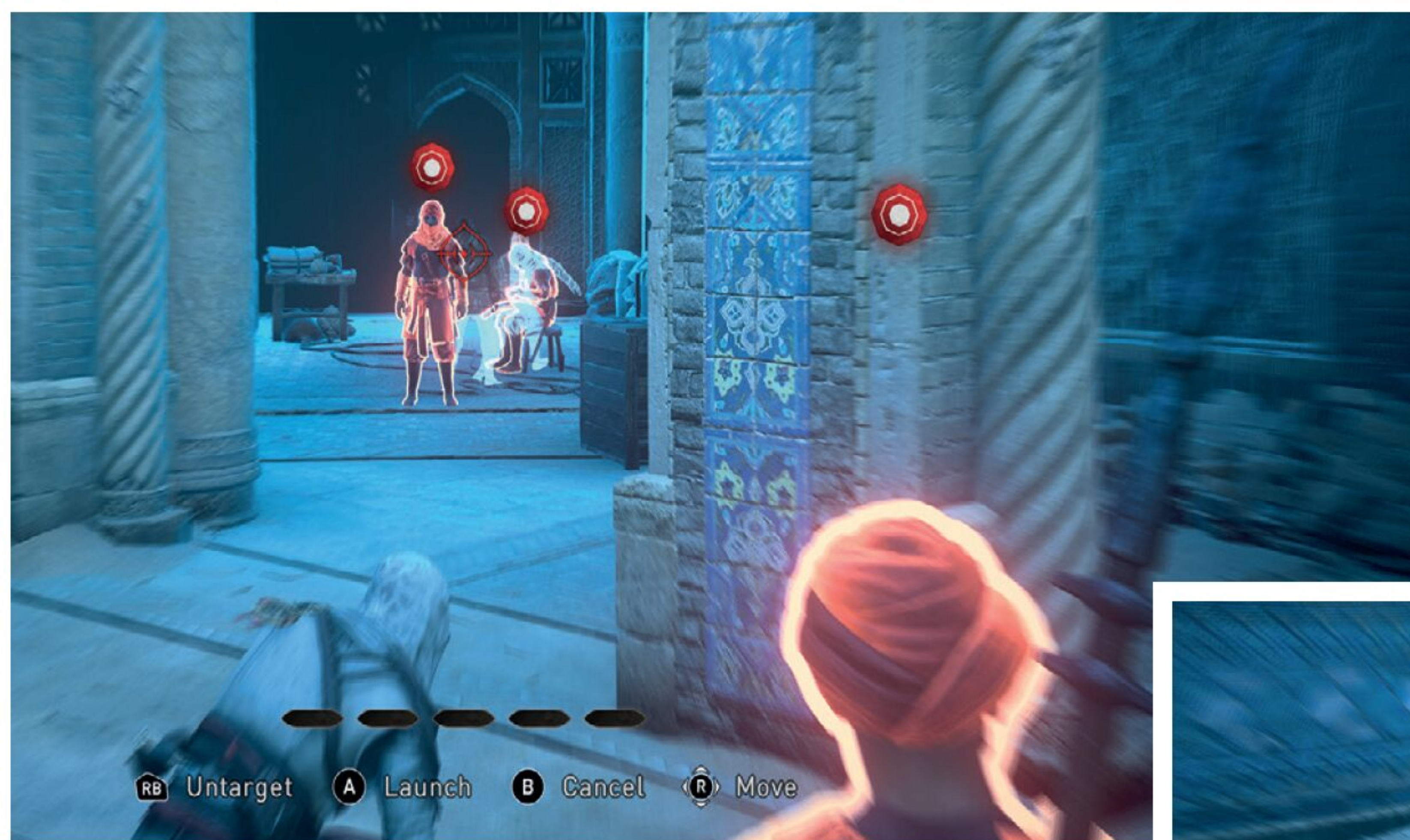


Above: Boat trips aren't necessary at all, but the water looks so lovely - why not?

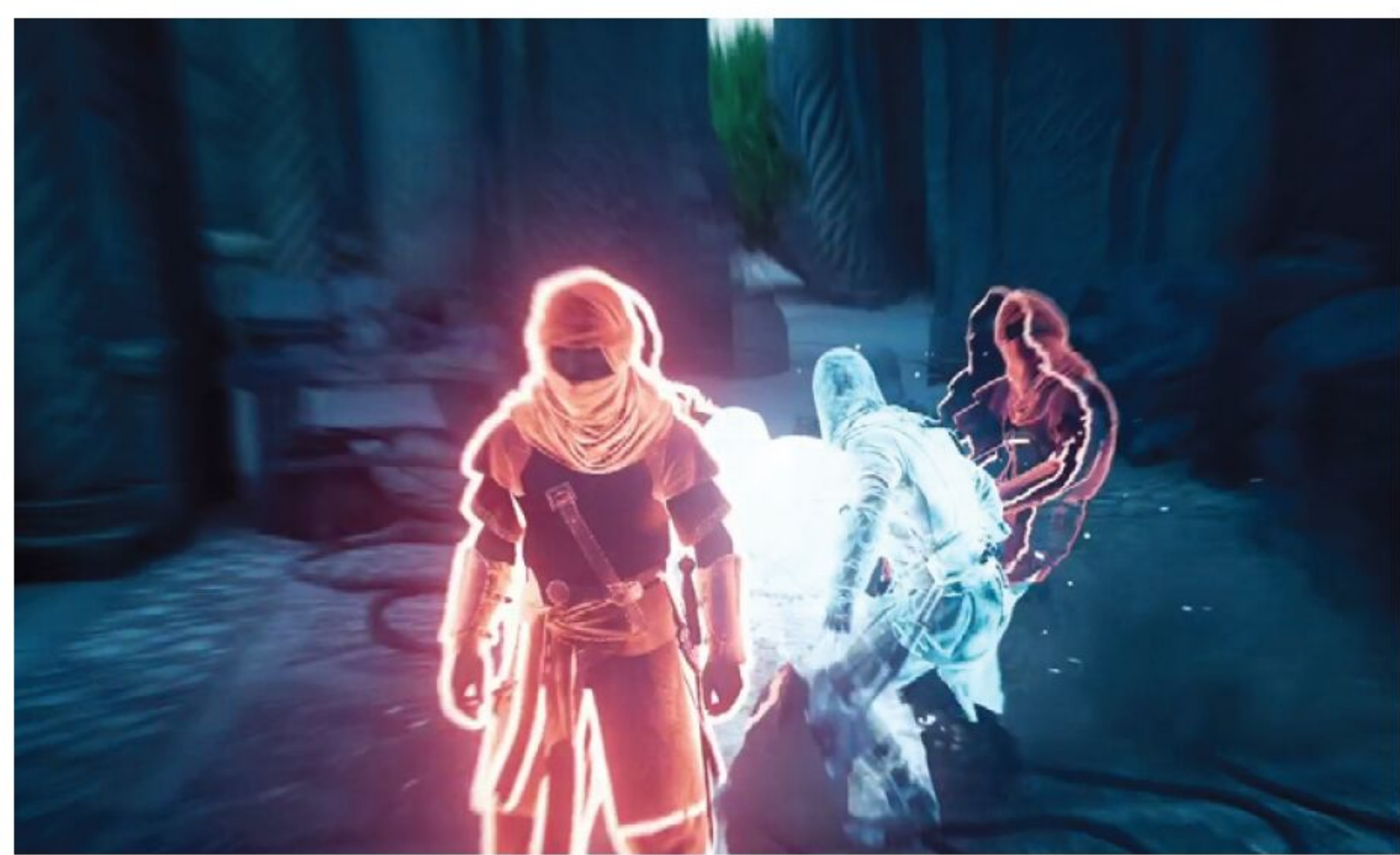
silencing guards even more fun. ‘Assassin’s Focus’ is the highlight – a meter that charges up to five blocks every time you assassinate a guard undetected. By pressing the Right Stick, you can freeze the action and target up to five guards within range and line of sight, regardless of their location. Basim then teleports to each guard in sequence, relieving them of their mortal coils in the process. What makes this mechanic so much fun is that once you start thinking about it as a teleportation tool rather than just another assassination method or a

‘panic button’ if you’re about to be spotted – the fun really starts. Although its range is limited, it can be used to create gratifying sequences that can traverse palace walls and cover distances without detection. All you need is someone to kill!

There are plenty of upgrades and collectables to search for if, like me, you enjoy that kind of thing. They’re all easy to locate; many can be discovered via story progression. The flags in the original AC were a pain to find, but *Mirage* is lenient with its secrets, allowing you



Left: Dropping in on some unsuspecting guards, Basim activates Assassin’s Focus and picks his targets. **Bottom Left & Right:** Basim teleports to each guard’s location and does what assassins do best before any of them can react. Nasty!



Right: We’ve all seen this one before, and we all know how it ends. AC games are set in a universe where the molecular properties of hay are considerably more advantageous than our own. Still, how these bales reached the roof of this palace is anyone’s guess.



SHOW ME EVERYTHING



Remember the eagle that would circle the top of viewpoints in the original AC games? In *Mirage*, you have your own eagle buddy, Enkidu, that you can use to scout the landscape for you, handily marking any threats or points of interest in the process. Flying around the entire game map at will is a joy, and your sightseeing can only be brought to an involuntary and abrupt halt by archers. If one does start shooting arrows at your birdie, you'll need to assassinate him before it's safe to survey the area from the sky again.

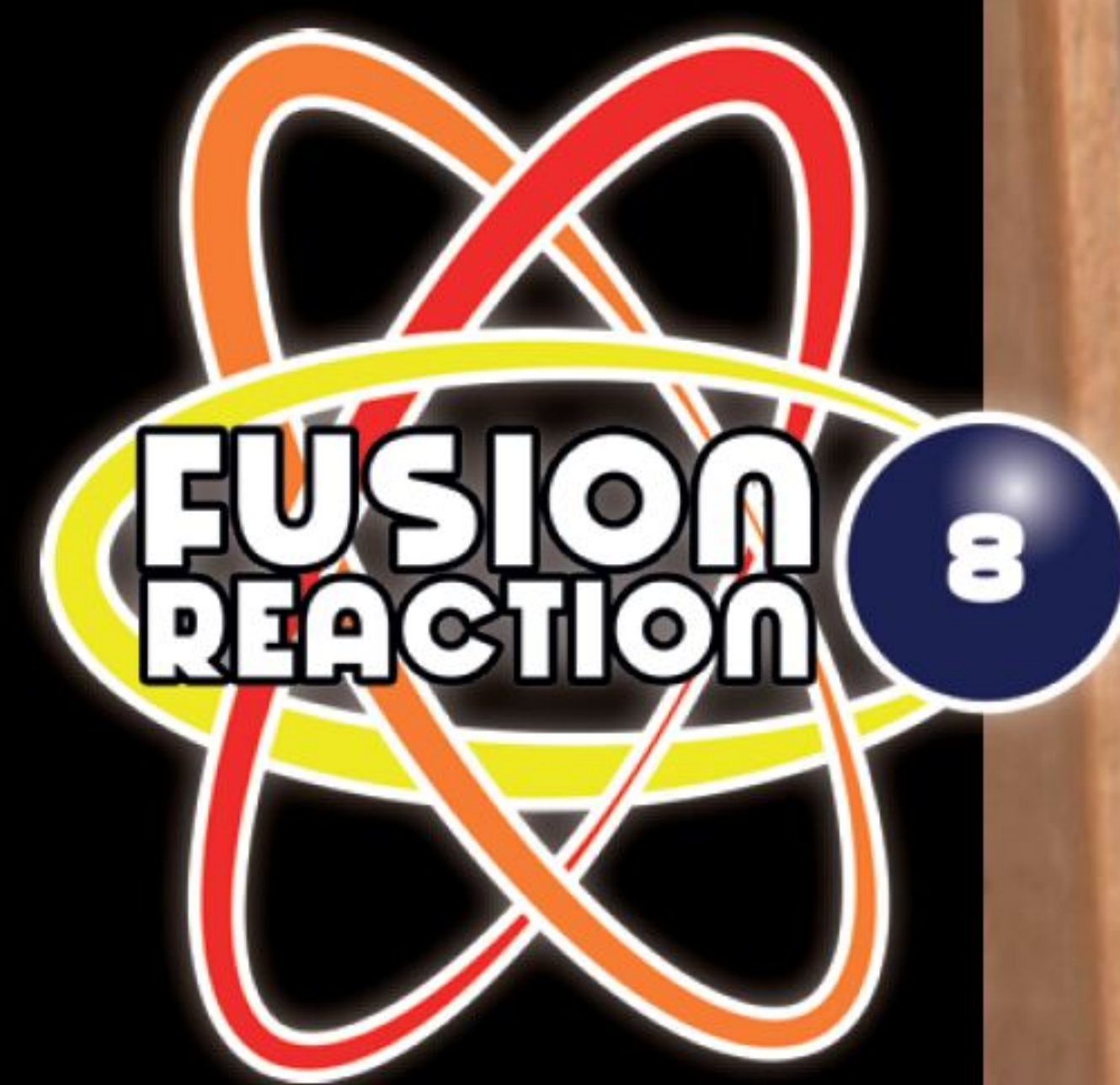
to start purchasing treasure maps as soon as you reach Baghdad. All your weapons and robes are upgradable, too, and doing so as early as possible will make your killing sprees all the more enjoyable. Enhancements to your throwing knives, smoke bombs and the like will be essential for infiltrating areas undetected, sometimes doing so without killing anyone (perish the thought!). It's all classic AC fare, and in all these elements, Ubisoft Montreal succeeds in writing an authentic love letter to the 2007 original and its first few sequels.

The real star of the show is the environment itself. The cities are densely packed and full of detail, and in tandem with *Mirage*'s excellent sound design, it's easy to while away hours basking in the ambience and looting chests. The surrounding Wilderness is equally enchanting, whether you're galloping through marshlands on your horse or trekking through the desert on your camel. *Mirage* isn't a large game by today's AAA standards, but the developers have made the most of the real estate available in this smaller AC project.

All this environmental beauty appears

to come at a cost, however. The character models, while acceptable, could be better - particularly the eyes. On many occasions, I was pulled out of the mood by the kind of 'uncanny valley' expressions I'd expect from the original *Assassin's Creed*. I also encountered glitches and scenes with missing character models or textures. Add two bona fide game crashes to that list of negatives, and I was all set to deduct a point or two from my final score, and then the patch arrived. Dropping about halfway through my playthrough, it seemed to resolve many of the problems I encountered. Sadly, the infrequent screen tearing in Performance Mode was still present at the time of this review.

Despite its simplicity, *Mirage* is a solid AC game that kept me occupied for sixty hours. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't spent two-thirds of that time ignoring the main quest and exploring, and that's exactly what these games are for, right? ■



EGX

2023

OUR ROVING REPORTER, FAITH JOHNSON, HEADS TO THE BIG CITY TO CHECK OUT THE LATEST AND GREATEST THAT THE GAMING WORLD HAS TO OFFER.

■ I always love it when a gaming convention comes to London, and I get to go hands-on with the latest and greatest games coming soon. EGX 23 was held at London's ExCel Centre from 12-15th October and covered more than half of the giant venue. The annual convention aims to showcase the latest games before Christmas and has room for large AAA publishers, indie giants, and even solo developers.

It also has Esports tournaments and Q&A talks throughout the weekend.

The biggest attraction this year was a friendly rivalry reignited between Nintendo and Sega, as *Super Mario Bros. Wonder* and *Sonic Superstars* showcased new demos to wow attendees. Both games took up considerable floor space and were understandably the biggest attractions. It's the first time since the 90s that both first-party flagships have a release in the same week, and by the time you read this, both will be on general release. I still feel that it's worthwhile discussing my experience with these two games at the EGX. There was some intense nostalgia about how Sonic and Mario were going toe to toe again after all



these years. Firstly, *Super Mario Bros. Wonder* was the only game that Nintendo had brought to the show. This was surprising given the number of releases they have upcoming in the next few months, and many attendees that I spoke to were disappointed not to see other games.

Regular readers will likely know how much I love Sonic, so, of course, I ran straight to *Sonic Superstars* and bounced with excitement as the queue dwindled to my turn. The entire display for *Superstars* was probably the best for any game at EGX. A giant Sonic statue was front and centre, while a vast, colourful display with many lights and palm trees adorned the front. It looked great and had me buzzing to try the actual demo. It's a decent *Sonic* game, not outstanding, but it plays like a proper 2D *Sonic* game from the Mega Drive era, with modern music, graphics, and character design. While the new look might not be what classic *Sonic* fans want to see, the game mechanics are excellent, and Sega has nailed making a 2D *Sonic* game with 3D graphics. The overall response from attendees was positive, and many commented on how slick and fast the gameplay was.

Next, I rushed over to the large Nintendo area and joined the excitement as I queued to give *Super Mario Bros. Wonder* a try. It was lovely to see a young family in front of me and the dad explaining to his kids how

Mario was something meaningful from his childhood. I couldn't help but ask if his kids had played *Mario* before, and he very excitedly said that this would be their first *Mario* game. It made me think back to my first time playing *Mario*, and it just goes to show how much 'wonder' the series still inspires. I played the game in one-player mode and again with a colleague in two-player mode. The bottom line is that the multiplayer doesn't work well because the screen becomes a cluttered mess of colour and action that feels random. However, as expected, the single-player experience is a joy. It may be a little safe in its execution, and the elephant mechanic is a bit silly, but *Wonder* is a polished platformer that is an excellent way for Mario to say goodbye to the Switch.

After the excitement of playing the show's standout attractions, I spent time playing some arcade cabs in the retro section. I hit a high score on *Pac-Man* and beat a couple of noobs on *Killer Instinct* before heading over to the indie section to see what the smaller publishers had to offer. My initial reaction was that many indie games on display weren't new. There were many games I'd already seen at conventions earlier in the year, and while it was great to see how some of these were coming along, many





were already released. I don't wish to put a bad spin on this, as I had fun playing some quirky party games and hardcore shooters, but it's worrying how the indie presence was not as impactful as in previous years. I spoke to a few solo developers who explained that the cost of having a display at EGX had increased. One explained that many of his peers were priced out and that marketing budgets couldn't stretch to a stand at EGX this year.

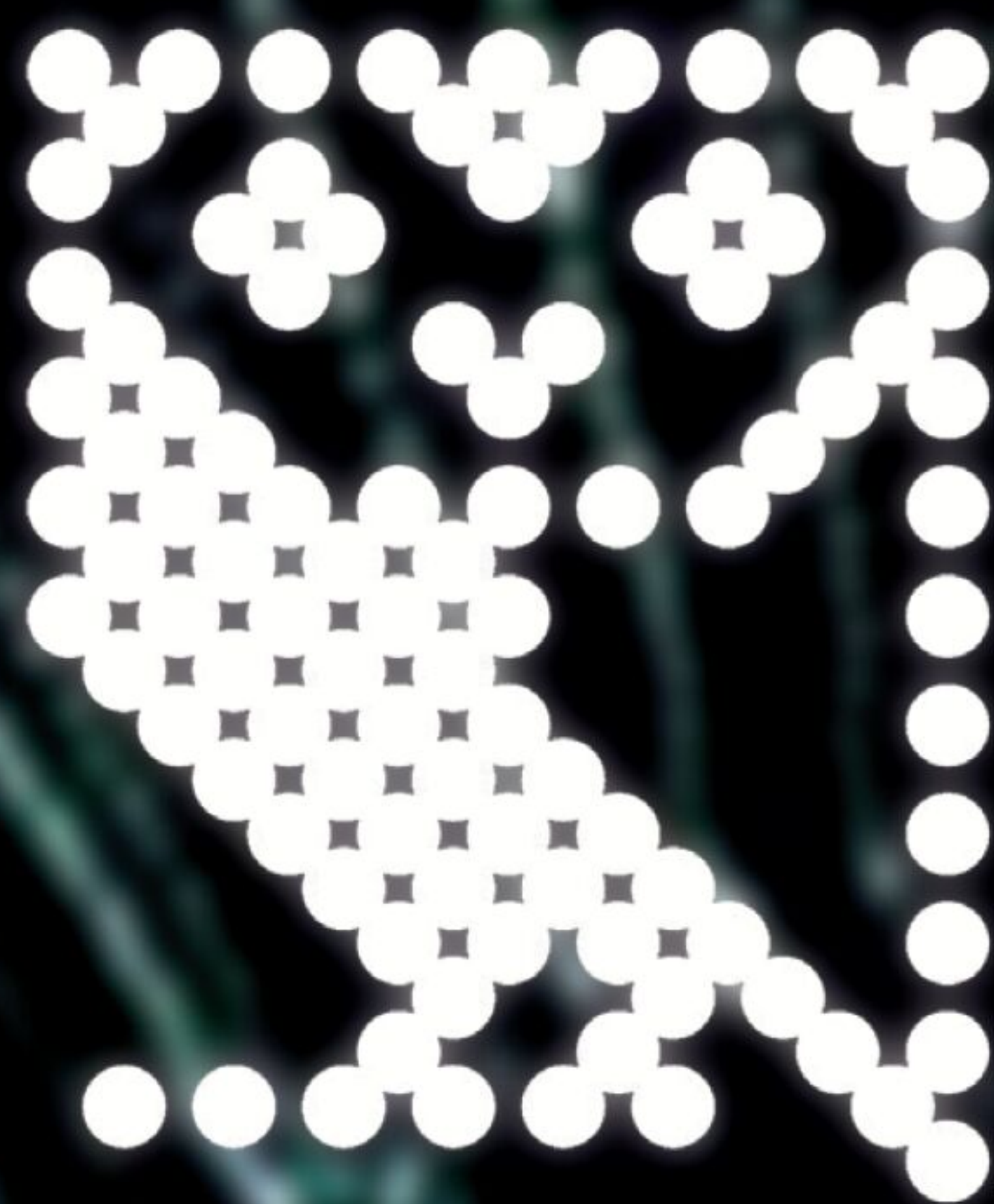
It wasn't just the lack of new indie games that was noticeable at EGX 23. There was no presence from Sony or Microsoft, and apart from *Wonder* and *Superstars*, the only other big game was the new *COD: Modern Warfare III*, which had already been on display at other events this year. As I left the venue and the electricity was fading, I reflected on the state of large gaming conventions like EGX. If the likes of Sony and Microsoft can't even be bothered to show up, and indie developers can't afford to showcase games, then where are we?

There was one adverse occurrence to

report on that affected the weekend: Just Stop Oil activists targeted EGX and halted a *Tekken VII* tournament. The protestors threw paint all over the stage and equipment before being arrested. I won't comment about oil and its use as that would be for another time and place. But, the protestors ruined equipment belonging to individuals who've spent hundreds, if not thousands, on professional controllers and headsets so they can compete at the highest level. The tournament continued 45 minutes later once the paint had been cleaned up.

I have hope that, in the future, big, national gaming conventions will get back to being the extravaganzas they once were. I can't say enough good stuff about the staff at EGX and the venue itself. The atmosphere was buzzing for the most part, and it was great to see so many gamers of different ages. Personally, without *Sonic Superstars*, it might have been a disappointing weekend for me. So, at least I got to try *Superstars* early and hang out with colleagues for a day. Roll on next year. ■

DOCTOR WHO



THE BBC MICRO GAMES

WORDS BY ZOË KIRK-ROBINSON

■ Despite its sixty-year run, Doctor Who has yet to produce a decent video game. The Time Lord's digital adaptations began with three titles on the BBC Micro, which seems appropriate. This issue, to celebrate the Doctor's diamond jubilee, we're hopping into the TARDIS to go back and check out those first electronic adventures.

DOCTOR WHO: THE FIRST ADVENTURE

The BBC Micro was home to many clones of popular arcade games (I'm looking at you, *Repton!*), so it will come as no surprise that the very first Doctor Who game is nothing more than a collection of arcade rip-offs. Cunningly titled *Doctor Who: The First Adventure* and boasting an atrocious beeper rendition of the show's iconic theme tune, the game defies all logic right from the start.

The box art features the Fifth Doctor, but whether that's actually you and why you have fifteen regenerations to play with is never explained. If we start as the Fifth Doctor, we will be the Twentieth Doctor by the time the sweet embrace of death comes to relieve us from the

torment of this atrocious game. Even the TV show has yet to go that far!

The game is split over four levels, each more obnoxious than the last. You begin by moving a cursor around a blocky maze, avoiding worm-like monsters while attempting to collect the three pieces of the Key to Time (there were six in the show, but let's not complain). Next, it's on to the worst clone of *Frogger* known to man. Get the eye drops ready because the BBC can display 16 colours, and the programmer is determined to use all of them at once! It's not difficult to plant the five "bombs" you need to blow up a castle (while your companion is still inside it, by the way), so this level is mercifully short.

In the third level, the notoriously pacifistic Doctor goes in all guns blazing. Someone nicked the TARDIS, and it's now your job to murder every single example of this alien planet's wildlife to get it back. It's *Space Invaders* with a rapidly decreasing play area, and it's the best level in the entire game. Like all the rest, it's not hard to complete. The final challenge is *Battleships*. You get six torpedoes, and it's your job to murder four sets of aliens with them. Again, The Doctor is supposed to be a pacifist, but this game does not care one jot. The aliens are hiding, so you've got to uncover them with some form of locator beam, then blast them to kingdom come by

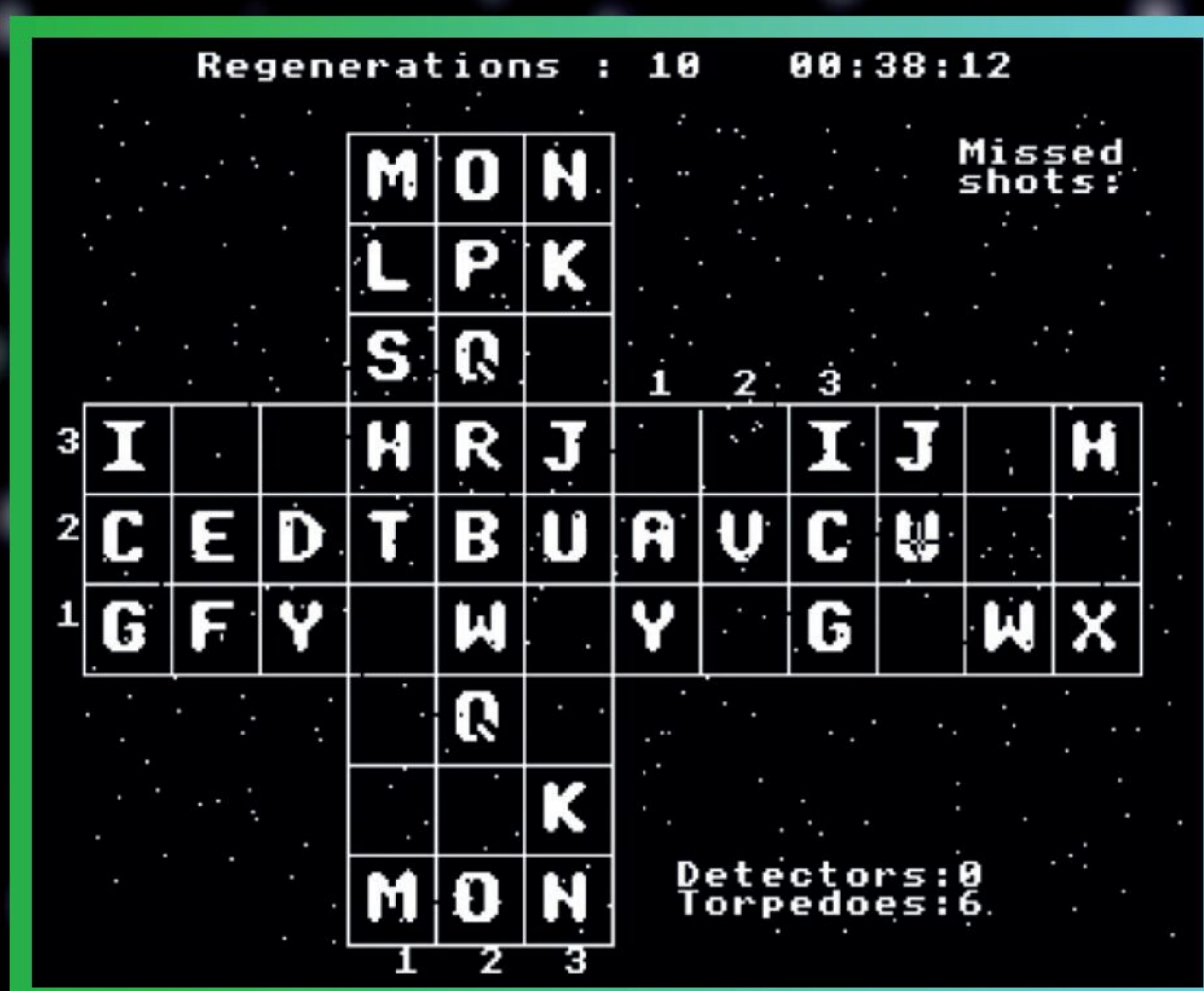
entering the coordinates you think they are hiding in. If you're confused about why you're asked for three coordinates, it's because you're playing on a cube but looking at a flat plane. The game doesn't tell you this, so good luck.

If you know what you're doing, you can finish the entire game in ten minutes. If you don't know what you're doing, you might make the mistake of actually playing this game. Aside from the *Space Invaders*-style level, *The First Adventure* flits between abject tedium and outright obnoxiousness. It's the 'Greatest Hits' of bad game design and should be avoided at all costs.

SCORE: 2 TARDISES, 3 OWLS



Clockwise from top left below: Levels 1-4 of *Doctor Who: The First Adventure*.



DOCTOR WHO AND THE WARLORD

This text adventure was written by former Fourth Doctor producer Graham Williams and featured prominently in the BBC's Computer Literacy Project. It's split over two sides of a cassette tape, requires a password obtained after completing Part One to access Part Two, and is hard as nails. If you thought Infocom games were unfair, wait until you see how easily you can die from even the smallest slip-up here. Sierra adventure games have killed fewer people than this game.

You don't play as The Doctor here. Instead, you're his companion. For the first section, The Doctor isn't even in the game. You get separated before the story starts and must find him, which is an interesting idea for the story. Apparently, The Doctor managed to cause some immense victory for the King of this planet in some alien war (typical Doctor behaviour), and he did it while you were off lying unconscious somewhere (also typical Doctor behaviour).

The writing is excellent, the puzzles are relatively straightforward, and it feels like a typical Doctor Who story. Despite its unforgiving nature, this is a decent text adventure, and veterans of the genre will no doubt enjoy it.

SCORE: 4 TARDISES, 1 OWL



evidently the site of a laser attack in the recent battle. Rubble and earth are black and scorching. Two gold roubles lie at your feet.

→ N

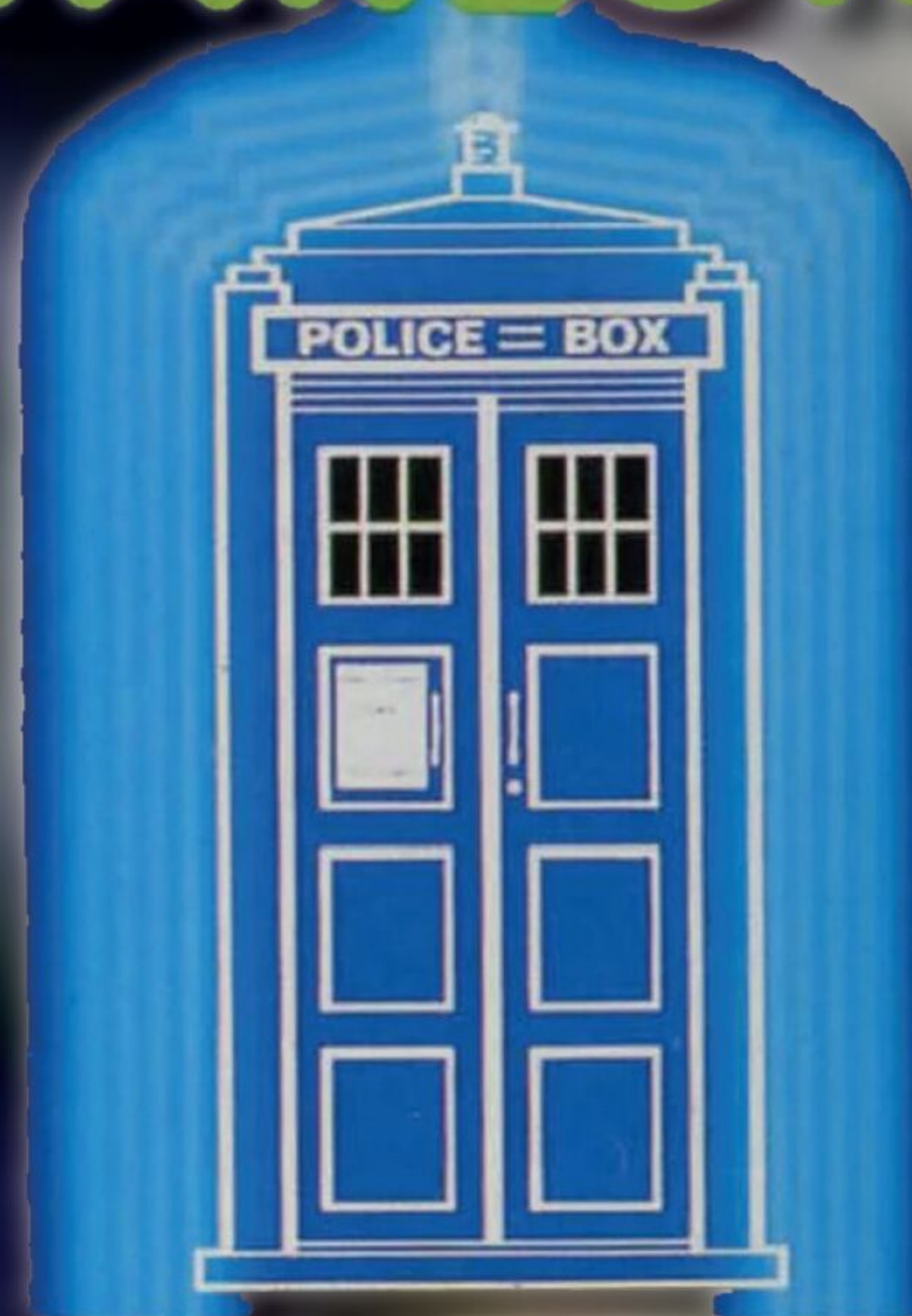
You are on the edge of the battlefield, which stretches as far as the eye can see. Some distance to the west there is a neat group of domed tents.

→ W

You are surrounded by armed men, for you have stumbled into King Varangar's battle headquarters. Varangar's blood guard are at least six feet six inches tall even without their space armour, and have long orange fur. They inspect you suspiciously over their tusks.

→

DOCTOR WHO AND THE WARLORD



A TEXT ADVENTURE

TIMELINES

Doctor Who: The First Adventure

System: BBC Micro

Year: 1983

Publisher: BBC Software

Written by Jeremy Ruston

Doctor Who and The Warlord

System: BBC Micro

Year: 1985

Publisher: BBC Software

Designed by Graham Williams

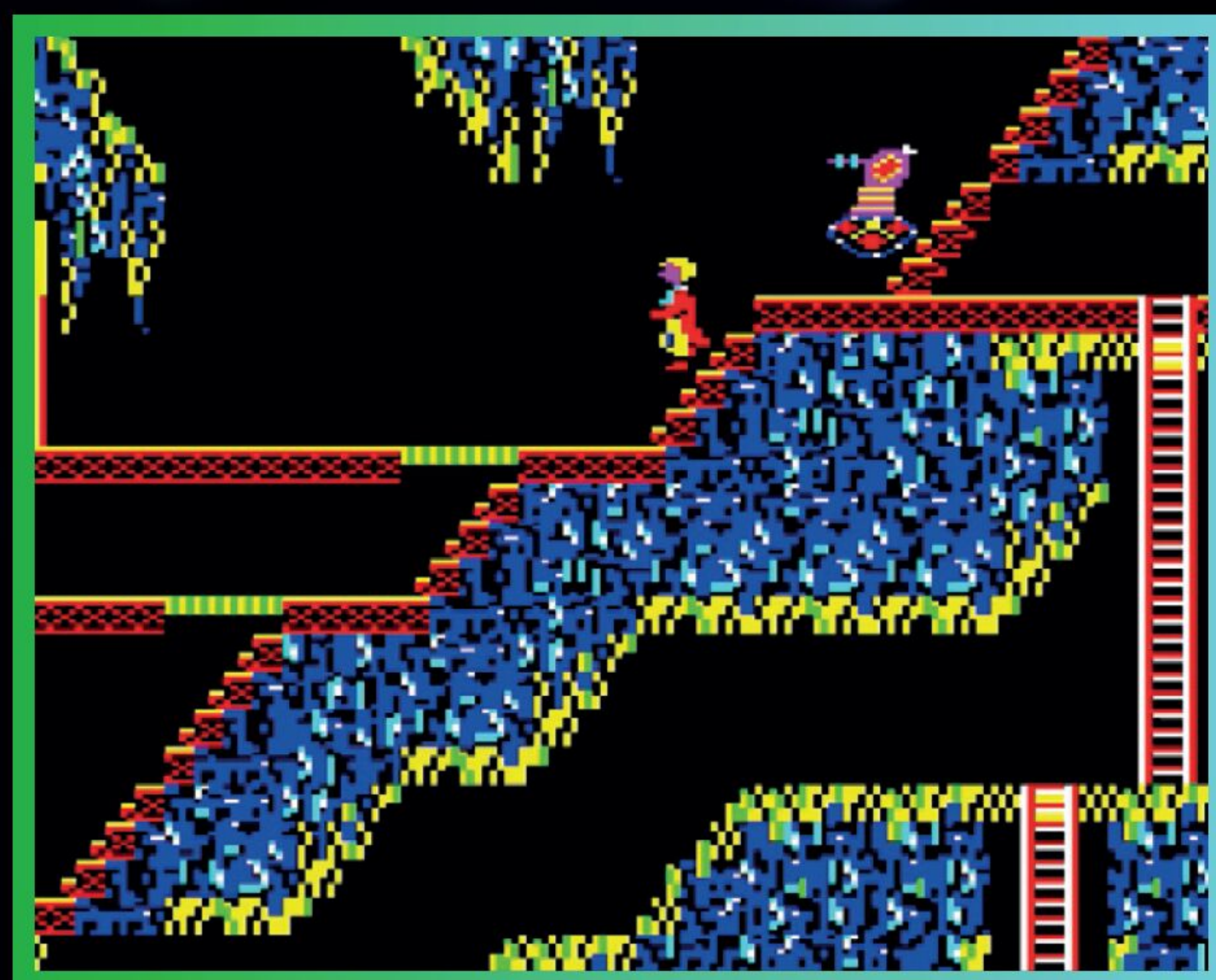
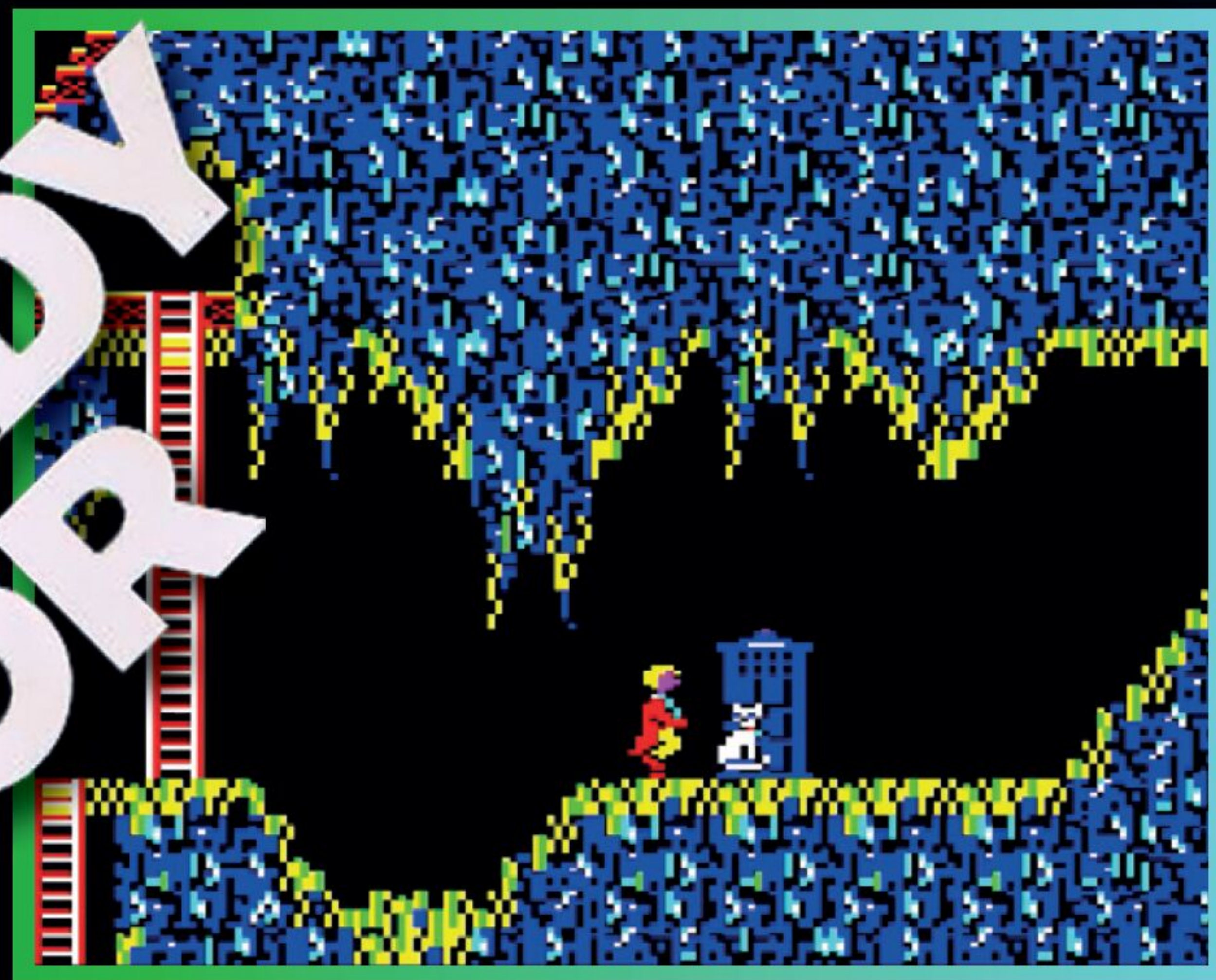
Doctor Who and The Mines of Terror

System: BBC Micro, C64, Amstrad CPC

Year: 1985

Publisher: Micro Power

Developed by Gary Partis



DOCTOR WHO AND THE MINES OF TERROR

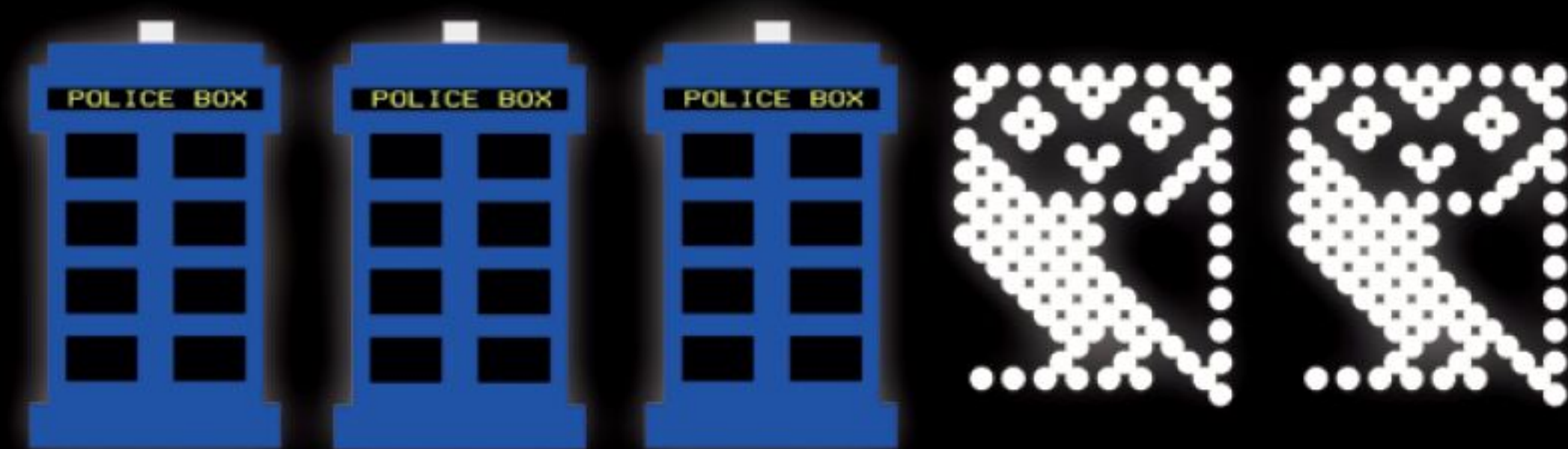
The third and final game in the BBC trilogy finds us playing as the Sixth Doctor and his companion. K9 may have been too expensive to license, so we've got Splinx the cat instead. Also, the Daleks were too expensive, so now we've got "Controllers", the Dalek-esque tank creatures that look rather cool. Their design is surprisingly cute; they are cheerful and well-animated.

So the Master has been producing a load of "Heatonite", and there's some weird device called a TIRU, which the game's manual says The Master will put The Doctor's brain inside to create a weapon. There are also some stolen Time Lord plans. Your job is to stop the Heatonite production, destroy TIRU, and retrieve the plans. You get five lives to do all this, which

shows that nobody involved with these games knew how many regenerations The Doctor has.

You can program Splinx to perform basic tasks, and while the interface is clunky, you'll have to grin and bear it because, without Splinx's help, you won't get far. Everything will kill The Doctor, and he can't jump to save his life. Movement controls are decent enough, and the animations are good, but the map is far too big for what is essentially a basic graphic adventure with a programmable companion gimmick. As a result, it's too dull and repetitive to recommend. ■

SCORE: 3 TARDISES, 2 OWLS



FUSION REACTOR

A MONTH IN THE LIFE OF GAMING.

THE FUSION TEAM

BEN MAGNET GRACES US WITH HIS PRESENCE, SEEMINGLY AFTER BEING LOST IN HYRULE FOR SIX MONTHS. TOY POLLOI IS CELEBRATING TEN YEARS ON YOUTUBE AND I'M TAKING THE MONTH OFF BECAUSE THERE IS NO ROOM LEFT ON THE PAGE - ED.



ANDREW FISHER:

A very testing month, recovering from major surgery (you should see the scar!) and my laptop failing (still under warranty but requiring new parts). But with the laptop now back, I am once again addicted to *Vampire Survivors* and *Powerwash Simulator* on PC Game Pass and checking out the brilliant *SNK vs Capcom* on C64 inspired by the Chibi look of the Neo Geo Pocket games. Progress on the new book to be published in the New Year has also been rapid, thanks to designer Steve Day.



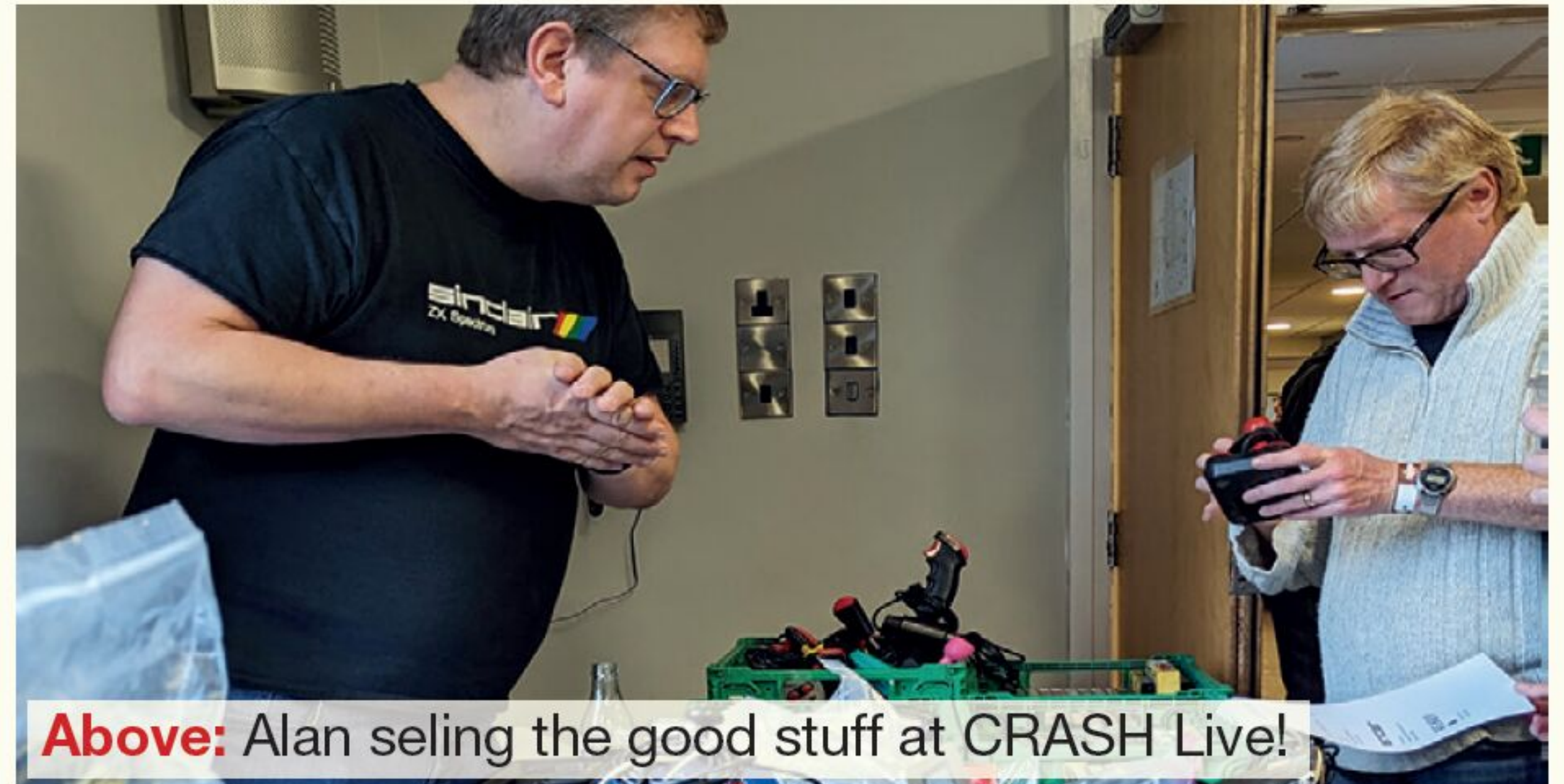
ALAN HAMMERTON:

CRASH Live! 2023 has been what many of us have been focusing on since the last issue of FUSION, and I'm pleased to report it was a huge success. I took the opportunity to become a shopkeeper for a day to slim down my collection by selling my spare bits and pieces. I certainly have a newfound respect for anyone who runs a retro gaming shop – it's hard work. I've also just discovered that a new Densha de Go! plug-and-play system will be released in Japan next month, so all-in-all, I've had a rather excellent month.



FAITH JOHNSON:

I've been having a blast returning to our gaming roots this month. I reviewed the new Atari 2600+ for Fusion and gave my



Above: Alan selling the good stuff at CRASH Live!

thoughts on this interesting device that mixes modern tech with old hardware. I must say that *Berzerk* is still a true arcade classic, and trading high scores with my boyfriend on *Missile Command* has been a lot of fun. The other stand out for me this month has been Yu Suzuki's *Air Twister*, which I've been blasting away on. It pays homage to everything that made *Space Harrier* great and drags it into a modern game that simply screams Sega arcade games of old. I feel spoilt but just so happy we live in a great time for gaming.



TOY POLLOI:

It's all "GO" here at Toy Polloi because January 14th, 2024 marks ten years since I uploaded my first video to YouTube. I've been going back through some of my early videos, and it's amazing how much progress I have made in that time. Not only in how I produce and present videos, but also in the skills and repair techniques I have learned. Many restorations I cover now on the channel would have been beyond my abilities at the start. Here's to the next ten years!



ANDREW OYSTON:

A return to Shadow Moses Island this month as the *Metal Gear Solid Collection Volume 1* provides an entertaining way of reliving these Konami classics. They also make a nice change of pace from *Forza Motorsport*,



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**Above:** George's PS3 will be missed by all who knew it.

which, although technically impressive, feels even more soulless than previous entries. I think I'll stick to the *Horizon* series. In other news, Tall Story Games has released a demo of their next point-and-click adventure, *Heir of the Dog*. It's a fun little snippet of the game and looks to retain the same level of laugh-out-loud humour as *Lucy Dreaming*, but 2025 seems so far away.

**BEN MAGNET:**

So, let's address the giant dragon in the room.

It's been a long time since

I've written for the Fusion Reactor. The main reason is that *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* has taken over my gaming life since May. The good news is that I finally beat the game and gave my PS5 some much-needed love and attention, which came in the form of *Sea Of Stars* and *Spider-Man: Miles Morales*. As a huge comic book fan, Miles Morales got me ready for *Spider-Man II*, but the real winner is *Sea Of Stars* this month. I have not fallen in love with a retro-style RPG like this in a long time and I constantly want to play it. I'm about eight hours in and already itching to beat it and write a piece about it.

**ZOE KIRK-ROBINSON:**

Gaming this month has been a struggle...to stop playing *Puyo Puyo Tetris II* on

the Switch! That game has it all, and I absolutely love it. My Switch is basically a *Tetris* machine

**GEORGE STURGEON:**

Can we have a moment of silence, please? My

trusty, backwards-compatible PlayStation 3 has finally given up the ghost. After several beeps, a red flashing light, and many reboot attempts later, one of my favourite gaming systems has sadly died. Replacing it is proving tricky as these particular models seem to be a collector's item (judging by the exorbitant online prices). On the flip side, however, the PS5 is going strong, and I have finally completed *Hogwarts Legacy* – an experience I thoroughly enjoyed, being someone familiar with the Harry Potter movie tie-ins on the PlayStation 2. To round off the month, I've also been revisiting a universally acclaimed First-Person Shooter, so watch out for a potential Super Stage. Stay Frosty!

**PAUL TWIST:**

My gaming month has been dominated by Mario's triumphant return to

2D platforming in *Super Mario Bros. Wonder* (see my review in this issue). Also, I've finally joined gaming's "ninth generation" by getting an Xbox Series X as a joint birthday/Christmas present. It's my first Xbox since my second 360 died from RROD. While I'm looking forward to exploring Game Pass and finally experiencing some of the multiplatform titles I've been holding off buying, such as *Street Fighter VI* and *Sonic Superstars*, at the time of writing this, my new Xbox remains in its unopened box, despite being in my possession for almost two weeks [Why, tho? - Ed]. ■

THAT MOMENT WHEN...



JESUS

Loa





SANTA

SANTA FIGHTS JESUS
FIGHT OF GODS (2017)

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